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A GIRL WITH A FORTUNE
JUSTIN McCARTH

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CAMIOLA

A GIRL WITH A FORTUNE

BY

JUSTIN McCARTHY, M.P.

AUTHOR OF "DEAR LADY DISDAIN," "MISS MISANTHROPE,"
"A HISTORY OF OUR OWN TIMES," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES
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CAMIOLA.

CHAPTER I.

FITZURSEHAM.

A CHURCH and churchyard stand on the edge of a broad river. The waters of the stream wash the outer wall of the churchyard when the tide is full, or even half full; and sometimes in the stormy days of winter and spring the waves toss themselves far over the wall, and sport and splash among the quiet tombs and hillocks of the dead. The visitor who looks over the low wall across the river and sees the heavy boats with their white or dark-red sails floating lazily past, or if the tide be low a strip of shore beneath him with rusty anchors lying on it, and the hulks of ancient

craft stranded high and dry, is apt for the moment to be charmed by the mere sensuous beauty of the scene into sheer forgetfulness of the associations with graves, and death, and man's sad transitory career, which are proper to the paths and the mounds just behind him. The church itself is a Georgian structure, with a square brick tower, and the tower surmounted by a conical spire of copper, painted by time and weather a dull green, and with a vane on the top. A pillared portico shelters the church doors. At least one famous tomb is to be seen in the interior; the monument of a great man whose career of activity was strangely cut off before his life had reached anything like its middle period. On a bright summer day, or, perhaps better still, on some soft sweet melancholy day of early autumn, a visitor blest with any sense of the picturesque who lounges in that lonely churchyard, has a dreamy and delightful time of it. His enjoyment is not likely to be much disturbed. He may lounge there long and often enough without meeting any other lounger. Taken on the whole, church, church-

yard, and river, it is not easy to imagine a scene more interesting and more suggestive of picturesque association. Yet it hardly ever happens that any one drops in to have a look at the place ; though it lies on the banks of the Thames, and if you lean a little forward over the churchyard wall and turn to your right you can on any day of reasonably clear atmosphere, have a good sight of the towers of Westminster Palace and the dome of St. Paul's.

Behind the church lies a town—it is not quite easy to say whether it ought to be called a town or only a suburb of London. It is not really outside the four mile radius, and it is certain that you can walk from the old church right into Trafalgar-square without a single breach of continuity as regards streets and houses. Yet it seems unreasonable to describe the place as a suburb of London. It has an existence all its own, and London absolutely ignores that existence. It is a forlorn place altogether. Modern ways have not touched it ; the prosperity of the capital has given it no share. Geographically it is

an easy walk from Charing Cross; morally and socially it is hundreds of miles and several generations away from the life of London. It is intensely interesting in a sort of way; it has the picturesqueness of decay and failure and utterly hopeless prostration. Grass grows in the principal thoroughfares; whole rows of houses are to let. Ancient mansions, which look as if they had a curse upon them, fall into green-moulded ruin behind great high enclosing walls. Some of these may have been, probably must have been, the dwellings of high and mighty personages in days of yore; in the days, perhaps, when the cause of the Stuarts yet had hopes, and victims, and heroes. Now they are tenantless, and nobody seems to mind or to take any account of them. It would be curious to know what would happen if somebody were quietly to settle down as an occupant in one of them; were to light fires in the musty old grates, and bring a besom to bear on the spider-draped windows. Would any authorized caretaker come to interfere with him; to ask him what he was doing

there; to raise the question of ownership and rent? My impression is that nothing of the kind would happen; that the venturesome squatter might squat and no soul interfere to disturb him.

The whole place might be likened to the point at which the buckets meet in a mine-shaft, one going up, the other coming down. Its occupants were those who were just beginning a career in the world, and those who, having attempted one and failed, were slowly, steadily, going down to reappear no more. Settled respectability of whatever condition in life had nothing to do with this strange, dreary, fascinating region. The very greengrocers who permanently occupied houses there were a seedy and ruinous lot. A spirited costermonger beginning with a donkey and cart and hawking his vegetables from door to door of these streets and roads, looked out with courage and confidence to the day when he should quit the place for ever and start a green-grocery in some more auspicious quarter. The ambition of every healthy-minded pot boy, baker's boy, and

servant of all work was to get out of the neighbourhood and set up in some more thriving spot. On the other hand the ruined and broken, the defeated and disconsolate, sought the place as if attracted thither by some natural affinity or supernatural charm. It drew them towards it as the enchanted mountain of loadstone in the "Arabian Nights" drew to itself all the bolts and nails out of the approaching ships. Perhaps one natural explanation of this was that rents were very low in this forlorn quarter, and that there were plenty of houses always empty to choose from. Some lunatics had from time to time ventured on running up new rows of buildings in the blighted, swampy fields, under the impression perhaps that an entirely uncalled for supply might possibly create an unnatural demand; and the laws of political economy still prevailing the building speculation came to its predestined end. Nothing was changed; there was one bankrupt the more. These houses, then, were always available for new tenants, always making silent, mournful appeal to some one

to come and take them. Many of them looked spacious and alluring to the broken and poverty-stricken refugee who sought cheap shelter in this Alsatia of the destitute. When the refugee had installed himself in one of them the ceilings immediately began to crumble and fall about his ears; the floors gave way; the balustrades lost in numbers; the rain leaked through the jerry-constructed roofs. The refugee took no trouble; perhaps even took no thought. Such occurrences were but incidents in his downward career. To what end making complaint or insisting on repairs? Perhaps when the time came to pay his quarter's or half-year's rent he might not be in a position to speak with his enemy, the rent-collector, at the gate. It would be better for him at such a time and under such conditions that he had not given any trouble about leaking roofs and falling plaster.

No theory that the wit of man could suggest would satisfactorily account for the existence of such a place in such close neighbourhood to the greatest metropolis of the world. Nor can we attempt to explain why

it is that every second shop in the less silent streets—there are no busy streets—should be a shop for the sale of fried fish. Even if the population were to live upon fried fish, there would hardly be so many shops needed to distribute the supply. There are some odd, ancient, beetle-browed public houses with red-tiled roofs which make one long to go in and drink beer in pure homage to their old English picturesqueness. There is, for example, the Old Ferry Inn. This hostelry is approached from the landward side like any ordinary tavern; except, indeed, that the visitor has to dive two or three steps before he finds himself on a level with its bar. It is one of the ancient wooden houses which used to be so common along the Thames, and which are now gradually disappearing, going out one by one like the fading lamps in an old-fashioned illumination. But the interest of the house is in its approach from the river. A boat brings one to a flight of stone steps leading straight down to the stream; you step out as you would from a gondola at the door of a Venetian palace.

When you mount the stone steps you come to a sort of ledge or terrace on which you perceive on your right a flight of wooden steps running, or tottering would be the right word, up to the top of a wall. If you mount these you come to a wooden platform which is contrived on the top of the wall surrounding the garden of the Old Ferry Inn; and from that platform another flight of steps descending takes you into the garden behind and beneath the wall. There, if the weather be fine, you may sit at little wooden tables on a wooden chair, and smoke your pipe and drink your beer, should you be so inclined. If the weather be not fine you can shelter yourself in the house, which is comfortable enough in its way. The public house is the one institution which never seems to fall into utter disuse among us, or, even in the most miserable regions, to lack business and fail to make money. When the lights shone on the cold river from the red-curtained windows of the Old Ferry Inn, on some gusty night in December, it was enough to tempt the wayfarer, who approached from the bridge or

landed from a boat, to spend his last penny for the privilege of a temporary shelter in so cheerful a retreat.

It will be seen that there was a good deal to be said in just disparagement of the region we have been describing. There was one charge, however, which no enemy could bring against it; no man could say that it was commonplace. A certain class of author or artist would have loved the place. The painter would have seen a picture in every muddy lane that crept to the river; the author would have found a story in every ancient tenement that was settling down into decrepitude. Such historic associations as the place had were bound up with the family history of the great man whose tomb was made in the church by the water. All manner of odd endowments and foundations bore the name of some member of that gifted and eccentric house whose fame reached its loudest with this one great man, and then was no further renewed. The family had become extinct, its title appeared no more on the roll of English peers, although the name

of the family was still borne by one or two persons in the place who were made conspicuous by it, for it was not an English name to begin with. It had been brought into England long ago, and its sound tells of its origin. The family name of the great man whose memory still clings to the spot was Fitzurse. As we have to give the place itself a name, for the sake of convenience we may as well call it Fitzurseham.

CHAPTER II.

MRS. POLLEN.

THE church, the churchyard, the boats, the old inn with its stone steps, were well appreciated by the keen and observant eyes of Mrs. Isabel Pollen, who saw them for the first time on a beautiful tender afternoon of early summer.

Mrs. Pollen was a widow who might still be called young; she was certainly under forty, and she would have been called handsome by many. She had full dark eyes, and a face which sometimes looked sensuous and sometimes moody and thoughtful. She had been the wife of a self-made rich and vulgar man, whom she detested and despised while he was living. He died suddenly while she was absent, and she was stricken

with a wild remorse because she had not loved him. He had left her all his property and his money and she was immensely rich, and childless. After his death she had spent some time in Jerusalem trying to find peace of mind there, and now at last she had come back to England with one or two set purposes of atonement to the memory of her husband. It was somehow borne in upon her one night in Jerusalem that if she went back to England she would find that Mr. Pollen had some neglected relatives about whose existence he had never told her, and to whom, perhaps, she could show some kindness if they stood in need of it, and do some permanent good. When she got to London in pursuit of this fancy, it was easy enough to find from Mr. Pollen's lawyers and agents some information to put her on a track. She had never, while he was living, taken the slightest interest in his affairs, or encouraged any confidence from him. She now found that he was born somewhere in the Fitzurseham region; that he had from time to time bought houses there; that he had become the owner of Fitzurse

House, once the stately mansion of the old family, but more lately turned to the purposes of an institution or foundation of some kind, and which, as the lease was now just about to fall in, might be in her hands almost at any moment. Nothing was known of any relations Mr. Pollen might have had, if he had any surviving; but assuredly Fitzurseham was the natural place to look for them. So Mrs. Pollen resolved to undertake her wild-goose chase. Her idea was odd and fanciful; but she was an odd and fanciful woman, with strange sudden insights, altogether unusual powers of observation, quick succeeding gusts of generosity, self-sacrifice, cynicism, despondency, self-disdain, and a mind absolutely indifferent to the conventionalities of society and social life anywhere. Her idea was to study Fitzurseham for herself; to find out if Mr. Pollen had any surviving relatives, to try to make them good if they were bad; to try to make them happy if they were good; to help them to bring out whatever was auspicious in them, and, if possible, to find children for her adoption among them. She began her

work in the very quietest and most commonplace way. She was staying in a hotel in one of the streets off Piccadilly. She took a cab to Westminster Pier, went up the river in one of the steamers, and made her way to Fitzurse House. Arrived there she had nothing to do but to ask for the person in charge of it. Mrs. Pollen never settled upon any immediate details in any plan of action until she had some personal knowledge of those with whom she had to deal.

"I can't begin until I see what sort of person he is," she thought to herself. "He ought not to be a prosaic or commonplace sort of person in such a spot and with such a name."

The caretaker bore the odd name of Christian Pilgrim, and he certainly was not commonplace to look at. He was a strongly built square-shouldered, stooping man, with a complexion worse than pallid; something greenish in its tone, and with snow-white hair, although his movements were those of manhood's most vigorous time. His dark-gray eyes had a short-sighted and wandering

look about them. He wore an old black velvet coat, and might have passed for a broken-down artist in the days when artists still wore velvet coats.

"Just the man for the place," Mrs. Pollen thought, as he opened the door in answer to her knock. "Sees ghosts and lives in a dream. He will help me." She introduced herself in a few clear words, her loud, strong, contralto voice seeming to startle the quiet loneliness of the place. He made his answers in a low and deliberate tone, speaking each word as precisely as if he were spelling it, and with the constrained manner of one who has to use something like force with himself to keep his attention from wandering.

"I don't particularly care to see the house just yet, Mr. Pilgrim. I would rather transact my business out-of-doors, if you don't mind."

"As you please, madame."

"You are not much of a business man, Mr. Pilgrim?"

"No, madame, I regret to say."

"Do you? I don't; I am glad of it."

Fitzurse House was a long, low, early

Georgian building, such as might have suited a wealthy squire who had a somewhat more refined taste than most of his neighbours. It was large, and had a great many rooms; but it had only two storeys; two rows of formal oblong windows, and a large door with wide semi-circular fanlight. The front of the house was almost covered with ivy and creepers of various kinds. The lawn was smoothly shaven, and set round with cedars and elms and poplars and copper beech. Mrs. Pollen's quick eye noted with satisfaction that there were no forlorn statues or plaster-casts turning green and mouldy in the unfavouring open air of English spring and winter. It was not Mrs. Pollen's opinion that a heathen goddess wearing nothing but patches of rotting moss is a becoming ornament of an English garden.

"No woman lives here?" Mrs. Pollen said quietly.

"In this house, madame?"

"Yes; I mean you have no woman servants; I am told that you are unmarried—I beg pardon; that you have not a wife."

"May I ask, madame, why you corrected what you first said?"

"About being unmarried? Yes, certainly. I was under the impression that you were a bachelor; but I saw from your look, when I spoke of you as unmarried, that mine was a mistaken impression. I am sorry if I have pained you in any way by my words. You see that I myself——" And she stopped short, and made a kind of gesture towards her crape-encumbered dress.

"May I ask again, madame, why you came to the conclusion that there are no women living in the house?"

"Oh, well, I think any one could tell that at a glance—any woman, at least, if she had eyes in her head, and knew how to use them. For one thing, there would be little attempts at ornament here and there, don't you know—plaster casts and things; busts of the Royal Family, and Clytie, and bits of rockeries, and so forth; and then again those picturesque fallen leaves, blown down by last week's winds, would never be left to beautify that path—fallen before their time, like young

conscripts killed in their first battle. Oh no, they would be all swept away with the broom of remorseless cleanliness. Yes, I understand these matters, I can assure you."

Mr. Pilgrim thought he had to do with a remarkably keen-eyed sort of person. He began even to feel a little uncomfortable under the inspection of her large, dark, encompassing eyes. They seemed to involve him and surround him completely in every glance.

"I'll sit here," said Mrs. Pollen. There were a few wooden seats standing about; she took one of them, and pointed to another. "Won't you sit down, Mr. Pilgrim?"

"Thank you, madame; I had rather stand."

"All right. Now, I suppose you are curious to know what I have to talk to you about?"

"As you have wished to speak to me——"

"Exactly; as I wished to speak to you, of course I must have something to talk to you about. Did you ever in your life know a woman who came to the point of anything

directly and at once? Come, did you ever?"

"Well, I really don't quite know."

"I do; you never did know such a woman; because you never before knew me. I am unlike other women in this, and I fondly hope in other matters too; I come to the point when I have anything to say. Yes; I know what you are thinking of quite well; you are saying to yourself that I am not coming directly to the point now. That is what you were thinking of."

"It is. I don't know how you guessed it, madame."

"I didn't guess it; I saw it in your looks just as plainly as if it had been in print; but you are wrong, all the same. I *am* coming to some point in every word I say, only you don't see it, and I don't want you to see it—just yet, at any rate. Well, what do you suppose I have come to this place for?"

"I cannot presume to guess."

"Stuff! You have been guessing all you could. Why not? A man must have some curiosity."

"I suppose you have come here with the desire to do some good."

"Yes, I knew you would think that. A philanthropic woman, an eccentric Lady Bountiful, an ambitious rival of the Baroness Burdett-Coutts, I suppose? You are entirely out of it, Mr. Pilgrim; I am not a philanthropist. I am not a lover of my fellow man or my fellow woman. I don't care three rows of pins about the whole human race. Why should I pretend to love the human race? I don't care about anybody whom I don't know, and I care about very few that I do know; and of these very few I don't suppose any one cares much about me. I regard mankind, taken all round, as an absolute failure, and I don't believe in any attempt to improve his wretched, ignoble, miserable existence. No; I have come here for a purely selfish purpose." She leaned complacently back in her chair, and looked at him. He was easily embarrassed, and she seemed to find satisfaction in embarrassing him. "You don't believe it; you think I am talking for effect?" she said at last.

"I don't believe your purpose is selfish in that sense," he said slowly, avoiding her eyes.

"In what sense?"

"Well, in the ordinary sense; in the sense we all have in our minds when we say a thing is selfish."

"You shall see whether it is selfish or not. I have something on my conscience, Mr. Pilgrim. I was unkind and hard to one who had claims on me; and I owe his memory a reparation; I shall never pass a quiet day or enjoy a night of dreamless sleep until I have done something in that way. I see a chance of doing something of the kind here, and I fancy it may be in your power to help me. That's why I am here. The broken-down epicure who goes to some bath or cure to get rid of his gout or his dyspepsia is not one bit more selfish in his purpose than I am in mine. Do you believe me?"

"I believe you are speaking sincerely, madame, but in that sense a Christian's repentance would be only selfish."

"Well, so it is sometimes, I dare say. No matter; all I wished to impress upon your

mind is that I am not a philanthropic woman, or a woman with a mission, or anything of that sort. I am anxious to know something about this place and the people in it, Mr. Pilgrim; and I dare say you can tell me."

"I go very little among them; I lead a very quiet sort of life here."

"Still you must see something of people. You teach in the evenings, I am told?"

"I teach shorthand, when I can get pupils, madame. There is not much opportunity for teaching anything in this place."

"No; I should suppose not. Have you any pupils now?"

"I have two—two regular pupils, and one who comes at odd times, now and then, when he likes, or when he can."

"The two regular pupils, are they boys or girls?"

"One is a boy; the other——"

"Is a girl; yes. A little girl, or a young woman?"

"A young woman."

"Poor?"

"Very poor. Her mother hopes to get

her taught shorthand well enough to take a situation as private secretary of some kind."

"Private secretary? Well, I may want such a functionary myself. What sort of a girl is she?"

"Quick, clever, good-natured; discontented with her life here. I don't see how she could be anything else."

"She is pretty, you say?"

"She is pretty, madame; but I did not say so."

Mrs. Pollen smiled. "That is how I knew," she said.

Mr. Pilgrim looked puzzled. There was a moment of silence.

"Do your pupils come to you, or you go to them?" she asked.

"The young men come to me; I go to the girl's house."

"The young men come to me; I go to the girl's house," Mrs. Pollen repeated meditatively. "That sounds like a sentence in a foreign phrase-book, doesn't it?"

"I don't know, madame; I was merely

answering a natural question in what seemed to me a natural way."

"Quite so," Mrs. Pollen said, as if she had not been listening to his later words. Then she turned quickly to him. "You think me an odd sort of woman, and you are right enough in that. I am an odd sort of woman. But I am not a bad sort of woman, and whatever my manner may seem I would ask you not to suppose for a moment that I mean to offend you. I sometimes say things just to give myself time to follow out some little track or other in my own mind, and then people are apt to think that I am rude. I let them think it, people in general, if they will; but you are not people in general. I believe you can serve the purpose I have at heart, and I like you; and that is one reason why I wish to know all about you; and I think I do understand you pretty well already. I am sure the more I see of you the more I shall like you; and I don't pay compliments. I am an egotistical woman, and I have been long accustomed to indulge myself and my own ways, and I

think you can help me just now—we shall be friends, shan't we?"

Her eyes almost frightened him. "I have very few friends," he began to say.

"All right; then you have the greater opening for me. Now, just a word. I want to make an impression on this place; I want to get into people's confidence; I have a reason for it. I want to know all about everybody, men, women, and children. I am ready to play the part of lady patroness or anything else. How is it to be done best? Shall I make a splash; or grow on the place in modest quietness? Should I be vulgar, or would it be better to go in for being refined. I *could* play the part, I *think*. But at all events I could try."

He remained thinking for a while; not quite sure whether she was speaking in good faith or not. At last he said—

"We are very poor here, madame. Our lives, the lives of nearly all of us, are pinched and withered by poverty. If we have pleasant dreams at night they are always dreams of money; and we wake in the

morning to find that we have nothing in the house and that the tax-collector is knocking at the door again. Our idea of an angel here would only be a beneficent creature in a gilded carriage with a big purse in its pocket."

"All right," Mrs. Pollen replied, complacently, "I understand. I can be that sort of angel anyhow; that is my form. It is a comfort to find a place where my angelic nature can be accepted on such terms. Well, about this house; I'll think it over and write to you or send to you in a day or two. Don't do anything until you hear from me. If people ask you about me you can say, if you like, that you believe I am awfully rich, and that you are told I'm such a fool that I don't care what I do with my money. That will fetch them, won't it? Now I want you to give me a description, a sort of outline sketch, of the place and the people; the high and the low. Tell me about this house, and tell me who are the big people of the place, and who are remarkable, and whom you like and whom you don't like. You talk and I'll

listen; I shan't say a word until you have finished. It is an opportunity you ought to make the most of, Mr. Pilgrim. I am a talking woman in general; but I'll listen to you."

So Mrs. Pollen settled herself into her chair, leaned back in the comfortable attitude of a listener, and looked to him to begin. There was nothing for it but to fall into her humour the best way he could. So he began; too shy even to have the courage to plead his shyness. He spoke in a low tone, with his eyes steadfastly fixed upon the ground the while; but he told his tale in good literary style, with an odd dash of subtle humour now and then. Among other things, he told her that the institution long domiciled in Fitzurse House had been founded originally by the pious and patriotic will of one of the members of the Fitzurse family. It was founded for the purpose of educating and putting out in life all deserving boys born in the locality whose fathers, grandfathers, or male guardians of any kind had fallen in battle on sea or land, fighting

for their king and the country against the French. In the early days of the wars with Napoleon, when the institution had a large number of boys inhabiting it and depending on it, the old family mansion wanted a tenant. The trustees of the institution took it on a lease for seventy-five years and established their boys in it. Time passed on and the boys were all put out into the world, and some of them grew to be old men and many of them died, and there were with each succeeding season fewer and fewer competitors for vacant places. The country got out of the way of fighting the French, and at length the supply of grandsons of a naval or military hero "gave out," as Mr. Pilgrim quaintly put it, and it was plain that there was no way of renewing the stock. The trustees, therefore, made up their minds to try to get the legislature to set aside the conditions of the pious founder's will, so far at least as to make its bounty applicable to the children of those who had fallen fighting their country's enemies of whatever race or climate. Even this, however, would not alter

the conditions of things so far as to require the maintenance of a very large establishment. "Fitzurseham does not supply many heroes, madame, to army or navy," Mr. Pilgrim said, and neither army nor navy had much fighting work to do. So the trustees decided that as the term of the lease was drawing to a close they would give up the house and grounds altogether, and let them pass into the possession of their actual owner. Times, as we know, had changed with the ownership too; the house and grounds had been sold by order of the Court of Chancery, and the late Mr. Pollen was the purchaser. One of his latest acts of purse-proud complacency was to buy the great old family mansion which he used to regard with reverence and awe in the far-off days when he was a poor little ragged boy in Fitzurseham. The institution had long ceased to do any teaching; for the good reason that there were no boys to teach. The last boy whom it had educated and put out into the world was a clever conceited lad named Walter Fitzurse, "one of my regular pupils, madame."

Walter Fitzurse's maternal grand-uncle had been a powder monkey on board one of Cochrane's ships when Cochrane was fighting the French in the Basque Roads. He was killed there, and the trustees made out somehow in their good nature that his death constituted a claim on behalf of his elder sister's sons, which they were bound to recognize. So Walter Fitzurse's father came to be educated and put out in the world by the St. Walter's Foundation, and Walter Fitzurse himself was allowed a right of succession. He was educated and put out into the world; that is to say, the trustees, when he had done with his schooling, gave him one hundred and fifty pounds, and left him to go his way.

"One question, Mr. Pilgrim. This young man; is he one of the old family?"

"I don't think so, madame. His father only took the name of Fitzurse just before this lad was born, and called him Walter Fitzurse. It was a dream or a craze of his; and this young man prefers to accept it as a reality. No one else does that I know of."

He told her many more things about the

place and its people. At last he came to an end and was silent. Mrs. Pollen looked keenly at him when he had finished his description, and, seeing that his eyes were fixed upon the gravel walk, she permitted herself to indulge in a quiet smile at his expense; or, at least, at the expense of a conjecture she has been forming concerning him. Then she said—

"Your description is very interesting. But are there no women? You haven't told me anything about any women, except the one girl who learns shorthand. You didn't think they would interest me, perhaps? Well, they don't as a rule; but still, as I shall have to know something of them, I might as well be prepared."

"Yes, certainly there are women," he answered slowly.

"You are not a woman-hater, Mr. Pilgrim?"

"No, madame; at least I think not."

"I think not also. I am very sure of it."

"May I ask, madame, why you are sure of it?"

"Perhaps mine was a general reflection; it may not have been a personal one; anyhow, I have never found a real woman-hater among men. Well, now about these women —the women here—I am curious."

"There are the ladies, as we call them here."

"Yes; begin with the ladies, as you call them here. We will come to the women afterwards."

"We have very few ladies. There is the Rector's wife. The Rector here is a great swell; he is an honourable, the second son of some lord. His wife is a greater swell even—she is the daughter of an earl. They have a house here, but they don't live in it much; they live in the West End of London. They come and stay here now and then; and he preaches a sermon or two, and she gets up charitable and amateur concerts. They have two daughters."

"Pretty?"

"One is; the eldest—a little, pale, light-haired thing; the other is only a child. They have a son; he is in the army—

away with his regiment in Egypt or somewhere."

"Any other ladies?"

"There is a lady—a young lady, who lives with them, in town and here."

"A relation of theirs?"

"No, I believe not; I have heard not. I am told that they are taking charge of her—bringing her out. I don't understand much about such things."

"I understand, quite. That is one of the professional occupations of the aristocracy of England nowadays, to introduce rich young plebeian women into society. It is a good business, and they get well paid for it."

"This young lady," he said sharply, "isn't a plebeian; at least, she does not look like one, I think."

"Are you a patrician, Mr. Pilgrim?"

He looked up suddenly, with a colour on his cheek, and emotion on his sensitive lips. Did the woman mean to mock him and his humble station? She did not look as if she meant mockery. Her eyes were fixed upon his with the earnest expression of a child

who has put an innocent question and is waiting for the answer. So he replied with something like composure—

"Of course not, madame; I am a poor and humble man. My father was a working clockmaker; my mother was a dressmaker in a very small way."

"Then why were you so ready to insist that this young woman, whoever she is, was not a plebeian? Why shouldn't she be a plebeian? Of course she is, or she wouldn't have to pay for her introduction into the society of the patricians. You and I are plebeians; we ought to stand by our order and not to be ashamed of it. Well, this young lady; I'll tell you something about her. She is very pretty; or handsome, rather, I should call her. She is tall and dark eyed, and walks very gracefully—something what certain persons would call 'queen-like' about her. She is sweet and bright in manner, and has kindly sympathetic ways. You know her better than you know the other ladies, I think; she talks to you more, doesn't she?"

"You know all about her, madame," he said, looking up with quick surprise. "I thought you knew nothing."

"I give you my word of honour, Mr. Pilgrim—and things are so mixed and upset of late years with women's rights and all the rest of it, that we women are getting into the habit of giving our word of honour, and even of keeping it—I give you my word of honour, I never heard of the young lady's existence until you spoke of her just now."

Mr. Pilgrim was not a man whose emotions usually found quick and vivid expression in his face. This time, however, his eyes lighted with wonder.

"Don't be alarmed, Mr. Pilgrim; it's not the black art, I can assure you."

"Is this what they call thought-reading?" he asked. "I was told that was all rubbish."

"It is not what they call thought-reading in London, and show off for money in public halls. But it is really a sort of thought-reading—face-reading, word-reading, hand-reading—using one's eyes, I call it, and putting two and two together. That's all,

Mr. Pilgrim; you could do it as well as I, if you would just give your attention to it."

"I can't see it." He shook his head.

"Can't you? I'll make it plain to you—so far as this matter is concerned. You said this young woman didn't look like a plebeian; I assumed that she must be tall and stately. You spoke of the other girl as a little, pale, light-haired thing; I knew from that that this girl must be dark. You were very angry at the idea of the tall girl being called plebeian; I took it for granted that you had more interest in her than in the other, that you knew her better, and that she must be a friendly and sympathetic girl. Is there any witchcraft in that, Mr. Pilgrim? That's how it is done."

Before he had time to recover from his surprise the gate was heard to open, and a man was seen coming in.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," Mr. Pilgrim said. "This is one of my pupils; the one who comes irregularly. Will you excuse me a moment?"

"Certainly. But stay; just a word; per-

haps I should like to see him. Is he interesting?"

"Very interesting to me, madame. He is, I think, the only friend I have."

"That is interesting to begin with." The new-comer, meanwhile seeing Mr. Pilgrim engaged in talk with a lady, had come to an abrupt halt near a flower-bed, in the soft sunlight. Mrs. Pollen went on with her interrogatory as if the visitor could have no better business in life than to wait until she was ready to talk to him. "What is he? What does he do?"

"He has done a great many things, madame; he could do anything if he tried."

"I have seen scores of these men who could do anything if they tried, and I have lost faith in them. Still I should like to know your friend. Is he rich?"

"I believe, madame, he has enough."

"Indeed? Now, I should by all means like to see the man who has enough. Will you ask him to speak to me, Mr. Pilgrim?"

Mr. Pilgrim went and spoke a few words to his friend, and then they came up together.

"A gentleman," Mrs. Pollen said to herself as she saw the new-comer. "Not of Mr. Pilgrim's class. Must be a good fellow, as poor Pilgrim likes him so much."

He was a handsome, well set-up young man, with rapid, easy movements, and a profile slightly aquiline; a slight moustache and no beard.

"Decidedly I like him," she thought.

"Allow me, madame," Mr. Pilgrim said, "to present to you Mr. Albert Romont."

"Albert Romont? Are you Bertie Romont?" Mrs. Pollen asked.

"People do call me Bertie Romont, I suppose," he added composedly. "The passion for diminutives is something implanted in the human heart."

"Then you are the young man we have been reading about in the newspapers? It was you who went out to New York as a steerage passenger in some dreadful ship and came back and wrote all about it; and you went and lived in some shocking place here in Fitzurseham, and showed up all the horrors in the papers?"

"Yes, I did that; but there wasn't much to make a talk about. It was capital fun; and it was quite time somebody did something about this place here." His eyebrows contracted; he was speaking in good earnest.

"Well, I can quite believe that. How long did you live in the place?"

"Oh, a few weeks only. Just enough to see exactly how the unfortunate people were living, and how little anybody was doing for them or thinking about them. But I really do not deserve any credit; I liked it. I like seeing things for myself. I dare say I wouldn't have done it if I didn't like it."

"Did our friend here, Mr. Pilgrim, know all about the enterprise?"

"Oh, yes; helped me in lots of ways."

Mr. Pilgrim had been standing out of the conversation thus far; he now edged awkwardly in. He felt inwardly delighted that Mrs. Pollen seemed to take so readily to his friend.

"Pilgrim and I are old chums," the young man said. "I don't do anything without his advice."

"I want to do something for these poor people, if I can," Mrs. Pollen said. "I hope you will show me what to do and how to do it."

"I don't think there is much to be done in that sort of way," Romont said abruptly.

"In what sort of way?"

"Well, I suppose you mean in the way of generosity or charity. I suppose you mean the giving of money. I don't know that you wouldn't be likely to do more harm than good."

"But you can teach me how to do good and not harm, I suppose? Is there anything to be done for them without money?"

"The money is so apt to go to the wrong people."

"It generally goes to the wrong people in life, I am inclined to think. But come, have you any objection to my trying to do some good for these unfortunate creatures? I shall be here a good deal, you know. Do you want to keep your beneficence all to yourself? May I not lend a hand?"

"Oh yes, of course; I have no objection——"

"Considerate young man!"

"Only things are apt to get muddled somehow, especially when—well, when——"

"When women interfere?"

"Well, yes, Mrs. Pollen, as you put it so plainly."

"I am sure your manner put it plainly enough."

"I am afraid I have got into a way of saying out too directly what I think."

"Don't you think much of women? Some woman spoils you, I feel sure," Mrs. Pollen said, looking at him with an expression of half pitying interest. "Tell me who it is. Is it your mother?"

"It is my mother," he answered, with a laugh and a boyish blush on his handsome face.

"I thought so. You are a younger son, of course?"

"Yes, I am a younger son; but how did you know?"

"Isn't it plain enough? Mothers only spoil their younger sons. What a lucky thing for you that your whims took the form

of philanthropy; for I dare say your mother would have indulged you in any folly. Shall I say any other folly?"

"I dare say she would." He was much amused and interested by her outspoken ways and her singular faculty of jumping to right conclusions.

"Well, I like *you*," Mrs. Pollen said. "Your mother must be a very sweet woman, I am sure. I think she has spoiled you very nicely. Yes, I like you, and I hope we shall meet again."

"I hope so, too. I am sure we shall; and in the meantime will you allow me to suspend my judgment?"

"About me?"

"If you please." He was evidently determined to be as outspoken as she was.

"Certainly. I shouldn't like you to make up your mind about people as quickly as I do. You are sure to like me when you know me, and I can wait."

CHAPTER III.

CAMIOLA.

THE Rector's house was the most considerable dwelling in Fitzurseham, leaving, of course, the lonely Fitzurse House out of the question. The Rector's house was a lofty, spacious, Georgian building of the least picturesque order, standing in all its unadorned ugliness behind low stone walls, iron railings, and a great iron gate surmounted by a gas-lamp. On either side of the gate, with its modern innovation of a lamp, were the iron extinguishers which told of the days when the footmen still carried the links to light their master's way. The Honourable and Rev. St. George Lisle, the rector, did not come to his house in Fitzurseham very often, or stay there long when he did come. He had

excellent curates, who did the work for him in what he had long been accustomed to consider a very satisfactory way. But he was neither a very rich man nor a lazy man, and he had church business to attend to in the west-end parish, where he usually lived. He was a tall, pulpy, willowy sort of man; he had an oblong, florid face, lightly thatched with yellowish hair. His eyes were of a mild blue, and were protected by moony spectacles. He was a well-meaning and an earnest man, something of a scholar in a certain way, very kindly, and more than merely willing to do good. But he was puzzled by most of the problems of the living world. Troublesome questions came up in his path and staggered him. He went through life like a short-sighted and awkward man trying to make rapid way along a crowded street, jostled here, jolted there, fancying he recognizes a passing face, and as he tries to look after it shaken out of all dignity by hurrying passengers and put much in peril by hansom cabs. People commonly took him for self-conceited and cold, when he

was only shy and awkward. He found it hard to talk to any one who had not a training and social habits like his own. He longed to get into sympathy with the poor of his district, but constantly broke down in the attempt to keep a conversation going. Once fairly started with some poor, working wife in her garret or her little back parlour, he could get on very well, and she soon came to understand his kindness and his good intentions, and became confidential with him and took to him. But every time he saw her afterwards he had to begin over again; to-day's beginning just as difficult to him as yesterday's. With men of the poorer class he could hardly get on at all.

Just at present the Lisles were staying in Fitzurseham, and were going to make a longer stay than usual there. The question of the housing of the London poor had come up, and the Rector's wife, Lady Letitia Lisle, one day saw to her horror a letter written in one of the morning papers, describing the condition of some of the squalid houses of Fitzurseham, which were declared to be an

utter disgrace even to London, and pointing to the fact that the Honourable and Rev. St. George Lisle was the rector of the place, and was a pluralist, and seldom came near Fitzurseham, and did not seem to know or care anything about the misery of its slums. The worst of it was that the writer signed the letter with his name, and that Lady Letitia knew the name, and knew, therefore, that the statements were but too likely to be true.

"To think of my old friend Kitty Romont's son treating me in such a way!" Lady Letitia said, quite aloud, as she put down the paper aghast. She was alone, but she could not keep from putting her thoughts into words. She was a kind-hearted woman, and not more egotistic than other people; but for the moment the whole thing seemed a wrong done to her. "My old friend Kitty Romont's son to write such a letter"—about *her*, or at least about the place in which her husband was interested; that was the same thing. "I haven't seen her for a long time; I suppose that is the reason," she went on to

argue. "I don't think I ever saw him. I wish I had asked him here. But I always heard he was eccentric—going about the world and starting all sorts of absurd things."

The letter was signed "Albert J. Romont," and was dated from one of the clubs in St. James's Street. There could be no mistake about it; the writer was the son of her old friend. Besides, she had heard of some of his doings before, just as Mrs. Pollen had.

"I do so wish I had seen her lately," Lady Letitia went on, still thinking of her old friend; "she might have prevented this. But she is so seldom in town; and one has so much to do, one gets out of the way of looking after people if they don't come in one's way. It is really too bad. My poor dear St. George will be in a terrible state of mind. I suppose I must tell him of it? Some one would be sure to talk about it; and—oh yes, of course he ought to be told."

She fluttered to her husband with the paper in her hand, and she showed him Bertie Romont's letter, and they talked the matter over. They agreed that the thing

was shocking, and that something must be done. The first step that was evidently necessary to take was to swoop upon Fitzurseham and see how they could help to improve the condition of affairs there. So they transferred themselves at once to their house in Fitzurseham, with their two daughters, Letitia Janette—always called Janette—and Alice, who was still only a girl in short frocks, and the young lady, Miss Camiola Sabine, about whose appearance and temperament Mrs. Pollen made such shrewd conjecture during her talk with Christian Pilgrim.

Miss Sabine had no near relations living. Her father and mother had been long dead; she had for many years been under the nominal care of an uncle, who was making vast sums of money somewhere out in South America. He was a very good uncle to Camiola. He had her well educated in England, and he had then contrived, through the intervention of friends and family lawyers, to get her domesticated in Lady Letitia's house with the view of thus securing for her

an entrance into good society. Mr. Sabine was understood to have begun his career as a cabin boy in a China ship, and he did not himself care for the gilded saloons of fashion, but he was resolved that his niece should be a lady. The St. George Lisles, as we have said, were not very rich, and money was no object to Mr. Sabine. So the thing was done; such things are done. Not long after came the news of Mr. Sabine's death, and he had left Camiola a large fortune.

Nature, destiny, and mankind, including women, would seem to have been in a conspiracy to spoil Miss Sabine. She was young, she was handsome, she was practically her own mistress and would be literally and legally her own mistress before long. She was very rich. She could not indeed boast of her family, but she had observation enough to know that there was much shrewd good sense in Lady Letitia's frequent declaration that this is not the day for good families, and that money is king and holds court and gives out patents of precedence just now. Therefore she was quite conscious of her own

advantages in the way of fortune, and she knew as well that she was likely to be run after by men as she knew that if she fell into the Thames she would get wet. Perhaps she would have been spoiled, perhaps her very best endowments of person and nature would have contributed to spoiling her, if heaven had not blessed her with one saving grace—the grace of humour; the gift of seeing the ridiculous as well as the heroic side of things; the gift in fact of seeing things as they are. By virtue of this possession she was able to see her position exactly as it was, and there was a good deal in it which gave her occasion for many a quiet smile. A young woman of no family undergoing the process of formal and gradual introduction to good society, and paying so much a year for the operation, was a creature in whose story she could not for the life of her help seeing something that was highly humorous, not to say ridiculous.

Camiola had now been three years domiciled with the Lisles, and it was more than a year since the death of her uncle. She

had not often seen him, but she could not be otherwise than devotedly attached to him after all he had done for her; and she had somehow got it into her mind that he must have been in love with her mother, and must have kept habitually away from England in former days on that account. It was just as well that she had not seen much of him, because her gratitude and her imagination were thereby enabled to convert him into a hero and a patron saint; whereas the truth is that though a thoroughly good-hearted and generous man, he was in the habit of drinking a good deal, smoking a great deal, and swearing ever so much, and had contracted many loose ways of living in South America which would not have had any charm for a young woman well brought up in England.

Lady Letitia Lisle was a shapely little woman, with quick glancing eyes and sensitive lips. She was over forty, but did not look more than thirty; the fact that her hair had grown prematurely grey only making by contrast the youthful-looking face seem still more youthful. Mrs. Pollen had guessed

well about Miss Sabine's appearance. Camiola was rather tall, and was exactly what one would call in the best sense of the word a fine girl. She had a finely formed head, a finely shaped neck, and the head well set on the neck. She had not merely grace of figure, but that rarer gift, grace of movement. Her thick hair was dark brown, and came rather low on her forehead, even for the fashion of our days. She had soft, dark, kindly eyes, in the depths of which sparkled a keen twinkle of humour, in sympathy and keeping with the frequent expression on her somewhat full lips.

A day or two after Mrs. Pollen's arrival in Fitzurseham, Lady Letitia and Miss Sabine were standing in the breakfast-room, Miss Sabine dressed for going out. Mr. Lisle and Lady Letitia had been bestirring themselves about the condition of the poor. Meanwhile Lady Letitia was going to entertain all the congregation, rich and poor. There was to be a concert by amateurs; there were to be various amusements; everybody who could do anything was to be pressed into the service.

The entertainment was meant for the poor; but those who were not poor were expected to come also, in order that the poor might not feel themselves classified according to their poverty. Miss Sabine, who had a good deal of the practical in her—"I come from the working-lot, you know," she sometimes said—was going to accompany Mr. Lisle, who had to make some purchases and arrangements, and so forth.

"Please see that they don't impose on him more than is reasonable, Camiola dear," said Lady Letitia; "and bring him back in proper time. I trust to you altogether."

"You sit still, Horace, and I'll get you there on time," was the reply of Miss Sabine. She was citing an American joke which she had read somewhere concerning a late eminent American public man. Lady Letitia did not understand in the least, but she asked no question. Mr. Lisle had not yet shown himself.

"Oh, by the way, there's one thing I must really insist on, Camiola," said Lady Letitia suddenly, "and that is that you don't talk too

much to that poor man—that old man or old young man, or whatever he is, the man with the white head, who lives in Fitzurse House. What is his name?"

"Mr. Pilgrim—Christian Pilgrim."

"Phœbus, what a name!" Lady Letitia quoted from her husband's favourite poet. "Where on earth did he get such a name? Christian Pilgrim! It sounds like something in the 'Pilgrim's Progress' or Baxter's 'Call to the Unconverted.'"

"It was something of the kind, I believe. He told me that his mother was a very devout woman, and, as their name was Pilgrim, she wished to mark him out as a Christian Pilgrim, and had him called so. It sounds odd at first, but one gets used to it. I think I like it now."

"He told you all this himself? You are on very confidential terms apparently?"

"Yes; I like him, and I think he likes me. He was very shy at first, but I have managed to draw him out."

"I should like to know whom you couldn't draw out, my dear."

"Well, I think I am generally pretty successful with people. I like taking a shy creature in hand and bringing him bit by bit out of his shell."

"But, remember, I want you not to bring this creature too much out of his shell. Let him stay in his shell. You must please me in this, like a dear good girl."

"I'll do anything in the world for you when you speak to me so nicely."

"My dear, I hope I don't often speak to you anyway but nicely."

"Indeed, Lady Letitia, you are ever so much too kind and good to me. I should be spoiled if I didn't remember to have a look at myself with my own eyes every now and then. But why may I not talk to Mr. Pilgrim?"

"Not talk too much to him; well, people might think it odd. He's not exactly a person in your class, you know."

"Dear Lady Letitia, I don't quite know anything of the kind. What class am I in? I can't be in your class, or you would not have to take such pains to get me into it. I

suppose you could do as much for him if you set your heart on it."

"Money means rank nowadays. When you marry and set up house, I shall beg for an invitation for the girls to all your parties. But it isn't only the talking to Mr. Pilgrim; it is the not talking to other people."

"People are all so dull and so like each other. He is not like everybody; he is interesting."

"But he isn't a gentleman; he isn't a man of education."

"He has more education than I have; he told me a great deal that I didn't know about the stars and the planets. Do you know, Lady Letitia, all about the telescope?"

"No, dear; and I don't want to know. But I am going to have a little star of my own here soon, and I want you to study him, if you don't mind."

"Is he somebody you want to marry me?"

"Nonsense, girl! What a way to talk! Of course he isn't."

"But why of course, Lady Letitia? You do want to marry me off some time to some

eligible person. I am on exhibition; I am like one of the girls in the Babylonian slave market; like one of the girls who got the money, you know; not one of the happy creatures whose personal charms were enough. That's one reason why I like talking to such a man as Mr. Pilgrim; he doesn't want to marry me, and nobody will suppose that I want to marry him."

"I wish you wouldn't go on in that way," Lady Letitia remonstrated, half vexed, but also half amused, as Miss Sabine could very well see.

"But, dearest Lady Letitia, isn't it only the truth? I know my own position in the world perfectly well. I know that you are my guardian angel, and have taken me under your protection, and I know you are determined not to lose sight of me until you see me safely settled in an eligible marriage. This is all right, I am sure, or you wouldn't do it; but why shouldn't we admit it—between ourselves, I mean, we two, you and I?"

Lady Letitia laughed. "I won't enter on

any scheme having to do with your marriage until you are at least one good year older. So you have that much time to consider yourself free of any plans on my part or suitors of my patronizing."

"I should very much like some suitors of your patronizing; I wish you would bring them along. I do believe you got Georgie packed away out of Europe because you were afraid that he might make love to me, or that I might make love to him."

Georgie was Lady Letitia's son, who had gone with his regiment to Egypt.

"It would never do for Georgie and you to fall in love," Lady Letitia said quickly. "What on earth would people say of Mr. Lisle and me if such a thing were to happen? Of course, they would say that we had taken a mean advantage of our position to get our son married to a girl with a lot of money. I wouldn't have such a thing said for all the world."

"I do think mine is a hard lot. I mustn't speak to one man because he isn't a gentleman; and I mustn't speak to another because

he is. No matter; I am very happy all the same. But now about this person whom I am to be allowed to talk to. Who is he?"

"Well, it's Bertie Romont—Kitty Romont's son; the young man who has been writing in the newspapers."

Lady Letitia, it should be told, had thought it a good stroke of policy to write at once to Kitty Romont's son in a frank and friendly way, and to ask him to come to see her, so that it might appear that neither bore any malice. Mr. Lisle said it was the proper thing to do, and that for his part he certainly bore no malice.

"Mr. Romont!" Camiola exclaimed; "I am so delighted. I am longing to see him. I do think it was so splendid of him. Of course I can understand that it is very distressing to Mr. Lisle and to you to have such things happen in this place; and I know that Mr. Lisle never could have failed to do his best to prevent them from happening. But still it was fine of him—and so young a man—to take so much trouble for the poor in a place like this. They are not even the

picturesque poor; this isn't one of the show-places of poverty, like Bethnal Green and that; it is out of the way of everybody: the special correspondent never heard of it; a philanthropist never came near it before. I think it was really very fine of him."

Mr. Lisle entered the room as she was speaking.

"You see he is getting some fame by it, after all," the Rector said; and then added hastily, "I am sorry I said that, for I quite admit that he did a good thing, and that he put some of us in mind of a duty which I fear we were sadly neglecting."

"One can't attend to everything," Lady Letitia said warmly. "You have your work to do in your own district, and no one can say that you don't attend to it."

"That's true enough, Letitia; but people might very fairly say that, if I can't look after Fitzurseham too, I ought not to hold the position."

"You are not a rich man, dear; you can't afford to make sacrifices; people might remember that."

"A man has no right to take money for work he hasn't done. I am afraid there is no getting over that plain way of putting it. But, anyhow, I shall try to do better in future; and if I can't look after the place, there will be found some one who can."

"He has got fame by it, all the same," Lady Letitia said, going back upon the previous question.

"But he couldn't have known," Camiola interposed eagerly; "he had no reason to expect anything of the kind. He might have died of the fever; he was very near dying of it, everybody says. And then think of the life he must have led all the time! He lived the life of a poor artisan—a foreign artisan. He slept in a room with several other men; fancy, a man brought up like him! I wonder how he was able to act such a part and keep it up so long, and never be found out."

"Well, that was very cleverly thought of," Mr. Lisle said, "and it did not come so difficult, after all—I mean to a man who could speak French and German fairly well.

He gave himself out as an artisan refugee from Alsace. He spoke usually in English, purposely made imperfect, and with a foreign accent; but if he happened to meet with a German, and was under the necessity of talking German, the German would set down his accent to the account of his French bringing up, and a Frenchman would account for his bad French accent by ascribing it to his German associations."

"But why not go as an English working-man?" Lady Letitia asked, with a certain tone of scorn, as if she were engaged in the easy work of unmasking a very poor impostor.

"He would have been found out in a moment. Every sentence he spoke would have betrayed him among English working-men. The company at the Old Ferry Inn would have known, after the first five minutes he spent in their society, that he wasn't an English working-man. Oh, that was all very sensibly planned, you may depend upon it; and very well carried out, I dare say."

"I don't like deception of any kind," Lady Letitia insisted.

"But deception, now," Camiola pleaded; "would you really call that deception—such an attempt as that to find out the truth, and all for the sake of people whom he had never known or seen before? Lady Letitia, if that was deception, and doing nothing is truth, then I prefer the deception to the truth—and that is all I have got to say."

"Suppose he happened to be a humpbacked elderly man," Lady Letitia asked, "would you be quite as enthusiastic, Camiola?"

"Yes, I should; more enthusiastic. Yes, indeed, more enthusiastic, Lady Letitia; for it would be so much braver of him to run such risks if he were elderly and deformed and infirm, and all that. Oh, indeed, I should! What do I care whether he is humpbacked or not; it's nothing to me. Perhaps he is, for anything I know."

"Well, well," Lady Letitia said, with a smile, "I shan't argue the point. I am glad there is so much enthusiasm left in the world as some of you young people have to-day."

CHAPTER IV.

BLACK PEARLS.

JUST at this moment a card was brought to Lady Letitia. She read the name, and then gave a little exclamation.

"Oh, St. George dear, it's Mrs. Pollen; you know, the rich woman who owns Fitzurse House. We must see her; we must conciliate her. Where is she?"—to the servant.

"In her carriage, my lady."

"You go and bring her in, St. George."

"No no, my dear; I'd rather leave her to you—at first, I mean. You will get to know what she is like. I want to be off, too. When you get her in, I'll escape; and, of course, I shall be delighted to see her another time."

"I must go with Mr. Lisle," Camiola said, rejoicing that she had to go.

"But I can't be left alone with this woman; I must have somebody," Lady Letitia pleaded. "Oh, Janette, you will stay with me; you and Alice."

The two daughters of the house had come in. Janette, the elder, was a short, slight girl, with pretty features, blue eyes, light hair, and a delicate, wax-like complexion. Janette was an enthusiast and a leveller. Alice was yet in that stage of growth when a girl seems all legs and elbows.

Mr. Lisle and Camiola escaped, and Mrs. Pollen was shown in. She was dressed, of course, in black, and she made a gorgeous display of priceless black pearls. Lady Letitia's eyes took in their splendour at a glance.

"I took the liberty of calling," Mrs. Pollen said, "as I happened to be in the neighbourhood. I am Mrs. Pollen. You have heard of me perhaps. I believe I own a good deal of property here. My husband was very rich. He died at Corfu, and I really want the advice of the Rector about some way of turning it to account, doing good, you know, and

all that sort of thing, for the people who live here. I am unceremonious; but you will excuse me, perhaps. I have lived out of England very much of late. I have just come from Jerusalem; and, to say the truth, I have always been accustomed to have a good deal of my own way."

Mrs. Pollen was playing a part in all this. It was assumed for a purpose, like her black pearls, and it did not much matter to her how she was received. If those to whom she appealed merely despised her for her pushing manners and her presumption she would have thought all the better of them and would have been highly amused. To produce such an impression would have testified to her excellent powers of acting.

Lady Letitia was good-natured in the first instance, was philanthropic in the second, and was a sensible woman of the world in the third. She had heard a great deal about Mrs. Pollen, and she saw that it would be a good thing for Fitzurseham if Mr. Lisle could obtain the direction of Mrs. Pollen's stream of bounty. Mr. Lisle would be glad,

too, to talk with any one who had lately been in Jerusalem. Besides, what did Mrs. Pollen's manners matter in Fitzurseham? In London her wealth would easily be made to serve as an excuse for her eccentricity.

"I am delighted to see you," Lady Letitia blandly said; "and I am sure my husband will be charmed to talk to you about Jerusalem. He is greatly interested in the Palestine exploration fund; besides, to whom should one come freely for advice if not to the rector of the parish? My eldest daughter, Mrs. Pollen; my daughter Alice."

"I see you are all very busy," Mrs. Pollen said; "and I am told that you are getting up a concert for some charitable purpose. Can I be of any use, and may I stay? Or am I in the way? If so, pray don't mind telling me; I'll come another time. My time is my own; all my own. I don't know what to do with it. But if I can help, do let me bear a hand. I have had to do with the organizing of many things in my time."

"We shall be only too pleased," Lady

Letitia answered. "We are going to have a rehearsal after luncheon. Won't you have luncheon with us, and then you can see afterwards what we are doing, and how you can help us."

Mrs. Pollen entered into the spirit of the thing.

"May I just throw my hat and coat there?" she said. "On the sofa; anywhere; it doesn't matter. Charming old house this is—is it Queen Anne or Georgian, or what is it? I don't quite know yet what to do with the house that has fallen into my hands here—St. Walter's Foundation that was, you know. I almost think I shall turn it into a dwelling-house again; have it done up and live in it myself."

"That would be charming," Lady Letitia said; and on the spur of the moment she began making mental comparison of the advantages to the neighbourhood of a rich resident in restored Fitzurse House, and the possible personal disadvantages to herself and the girls of having Mrs. Pollen for a near neighbour.

"You are going to have a concert," Mrs. Pollen said gravely. "It's a good idea. Won't much affect the housing of the poor, will it now? You can't very well invite the particular class who want housing to the concert, can you? The people with fever and all that, I mean?"

"It isn't meant for that," Lady Letitia said, with a slight touch of resentment in her voice. "Of course we know it won't do any good to the poor who want housing. But the whole place isn't made up of poor who want housing. We often get up charitable concerts and bazaars and things; at least not very often, but sometimes; it does good, brings people together."

"Oh yes, quite an excellent idea," Mrs. Pollen said. "Keeps up people's spirits. Isn't there some story about a general who had all the bands set going when some disease broke out in the camp—just to keep up the men's spirit? I think I have read something of the kind; but I forget things so soon."

Lady Letitia was dimly in apprehension

that her visitor might be chaffing her. But nothing could exceed the majestic gravity of Mrs. Pollen's large eyes.

"We hope to be able to grapple with the difficulty about the housing of the poor," Lady Letitia said hastily, "in good time; in good time. These things can't be done all at a stroke. No man is more alive to the duties and the responsibilities of his position than Mr. Lisle."

"One difficulty here seems to me," said Mrs. Pollen, "the fact that you have about three times more houses than you want. I see whole rows of new houses standing empty. But your poor are poor and can't pay for anything better than a share of a cellar or a garret. What's to be done? But I won't talk of all this just now; you pretty ladies can't be expected to understand such things. I'll go into it all with your husband; I fancy I can help him. I'll spend the money if he will only show how it ought to be spent."

This was patronizing indeed; but even ladies of rank who marry clergymen soon

get into the way of accepting patronage as one of the necessities of their position.

"I wish I had money," Janette said, with a sigh.

"What would you do with it, my dear young lady?"

"I would devote it to the promotion of great and noble ideas," the dear young lady said, in a solemn tone. "With true ideas there would be no helpless poor and no useless rich."

Mrs. Pollen fixed her eyes on the girl's delicate pretty face. Her heart went out to Janette in a moment. A curious feeling of pity, of compassion, swelled up in her breast.

"Keep to your ideas, my dear," she said softly. "They will not make you happy, perhaps, in life; but they will do better for you."

"Janette's a philosopher," said the younger girl pertly. "Papa says she's a philosopher in petticoats."

"Many a philosopher," Mrs. Pollen observed, "might as well have worn petticoats as anything else, for all I could see. But

about this concert, Lady Letitia? I have an idea. These rooms are not very large; now are they? What if you were to allow me to lend you Fitzurse House? Fine rooms there and plenty of them. It would be your affair all the same, you know; only the house put at your disposal; kind permission of Mrs. Pollen; that sort of thing. It would be a great attraction; a novelty, don't you think—the old place revived? Come, don't say no; it shan't cost you a penny."

"I am not at all inclined to say no," Lady Letitia answered graciously; "I think it would be a splendid idea. But the place has so long been disused; and the time is so short."

"Money will do anything. I'll set to work at once. We'll employ all the painters and upholsterers and plumbers and carpenters and people in Fitzurseham; that will be something in itself. Is it agreed?"

"I am sure Mr. Lisle will be delighted. I know I am; and I do really think it is ever so good and kind of you."

"Not a bit of it. It amuses me; that's

all. Why mightn't we let the young people have a dance too?"

Lady Letitia hesitated. "Well, I don't quite know what Mr. Lisle might think about a dance; he would be rather afraid——"

"We needn't say anything about it in advance. It might start of itself, you know, when the time came. It might be arranged just a little beforehand, like many another excellent *impromptu*. Anyhow, we'll have a good time, and invite all Fitzurseham, not forgetting the young foreign artisan——"

"Oh, you have heard of that?" Lady Letitia said hastily.

"Yes, I have heard of it; and I have seen the young man myself. I like him ever so much."

Lady Letitia and Janette were both very eager to know something about Bertie Romont. Alice did not care in the least. She was as yet only in the age when little girls adore girls of riper years. Mrs. Pollen had now quite dropped her patronizing manner. She was able to see through her new friends, and she saw that affectation of

any kind was out of place with them. They were quite sincere, and, as she concluded, good-hearted. She had expected what she called aristocratic airs, and she came determined to assert herself and her money at once. She found Lady Letitia a simple, intelligent, unpretentious woman; like a clergyman's wife, in fact.

They talked on various subjects—the condition of England among the rest—whereon Mrs. Pollen declared that she had had special need of instruction, having been for so many years a wanderer. "Is everything really going to the dogs?" she asked. "People tell me it is. Who is to blame?"

"Man's neglect of his brother is to blame," Janette declared; "it is to blame for everything that is wrong in the world. But the wrongs will be righted; this is an age of hope."

"The righting will come a little too late for some of us," said Lady Letitia.

"What about the aristocracy and the democracy?" Mrs. Pollen asked, "and the social revolution, whatever that is?"

"My dear woman," said Lady Letitia,

"it's of no use talking about the English aristocracy at this time of the day. The aristocracy are gone, and that's all about it. If my husband would take my advice we would drop our ridiculous honourables and ladies, and all the rest of it, and call ourselves Mr. and Mrs. Lisle. The House of Lords will be gone in no time; and even if it weren't done away with, we are doing away with ourselves as fast as we can. We are going into trade every day; we are becoming wine merchants and bankers and cab-owners; I dare say some of us will be glad enough to be cab-drivers before long."

"It is a glorious age, mamma," said Janette, with kindling eyes; "a day when we are all to be men and women at last, not members of different and hostile classes. Every one ought to be proud to live in such a day, and to work in such a movement."

"Janette is a working member of the Band of Hope," said Lady Letitia, in a tone of resignation. "She visits the poor—that is, the Radical poor. She can tell you all about the social revolution."

"I'm sick of it all," said the younger daughter.

"Sick of what?"

"Of everything, mamma."

"It will be hard work to get a girl of good family married in times like these," Lady Letitia said despondently. "What rising man would hamper himself now with any woman who had a handle to her name? I read some stupid stuff in a society paper the other day about a rich Radical member of Parliament being on the look out for some Lady Jane or Lady Blanche or Lady Something to marry and bring him social distinction. As if he didn't know better than that! —as if any one is taken in by us now! What good could Lady Jane or Lady Blanche do for him? If he wants money he had much better look out among the daughters of the soap-boilers and the cotton-spinners; if he doesn't he had better marry his washerwoman's daughter, and prove to his Radical supporters the sincerity of his Radical principles. Oh, here's Miss Sabine coming in. We can't have any more of this talk;

she might think it was directed against her."

"Camiola could not possibly think that anything you or I could say, mamma, was meant to offend her. I am sure I envy Camiola very much; I think her ever so much my superior," said Janette, warmly.

"My dear, I am quite sure I envy her, too," Lady Letitia said; "and I am quite ready to admit that she is ever so much my superior. I wish you had her fortune——"

"Oh, mamma, please don't talk like that——"

"And that she had twice as much, child," Lady Letitia added good-humouredly. "Will that satisfy you? That is wishing good to you and twice as much to her."

"*I* don't like her," said Alice.

"Nonsense, Alice; of course you like her."

"No, I don't; I detest her—because you and Janette like her, and papa likes her; and so I hate her."

"Alice's bark is worse than her bite," said Lady Letitia.

Mr. Lisle and Miss Sabine came in and were duly presented to Mrs. Pollen; and it was arranged that Mrs. Pollen's offer was to be accepted and that the popular entertainment was to come off in renovated Fitzurse House. Mr. Lisle was rather taken with Mrs. Pollen and her generous ways. Besides he was not usually very good at talking to women, and she had so much to say that she did not tax his conversational powers very heavily. They spoke about the condition of the poor in that neighbourhood, and Mrs. Pollen made many shrewd and sensible suggestions. Meanwhile, Mrs. Pollen kept her eyes on every thing and every person, and lost nothing of what was going on. She was studying the inmates of the Rector's house according to her wont. She did not fail to notice that when Camiola sat next to Alice Lisle and talked to her the little girl blushed crimson. "The child adores this handsome Camiola whom she says she detests; she adores her and is jealous of every one who speaks to Camiola or is spoken to by her—that's my reading of *that*," Isabel Pollen said

to herself. Of Janette she thought: "She is a dreamer; she will be awakened; she will be unhappy."

There was some talk at luncheon about the various forms of human ambition.

"Tell me," said Mrs. Pollen, turning suddenly to Camiola, in her abrupt, imperious, kindly fashion, "what would be your ambition, Miss Sabine?"

"Oh, I don't know," Camiola answered, blushing slightly. "I don't believe I have any ambition. I think I should like to make people happy."

"Couldn't be a better ambition," said Mr. Lisle.

"Couldn't be a better ambition, truly," Mrs. Pollen echoed. "Only I don't know how this young lady could gratify her ambition to make some people happy without at the same time making other people unhappy."

"I don't understand," Camiola said.

"'The smile,'" Mrs. Pollen quoted from Hood's "Fair Inez," "'that blest one lover's heart has broken many more.'"

"I wasn't thinking of lovers." Camiola

spoke with a certain scornfulness in her manner.

At this moment a servant handed a telegram and a card to Lady Letitia.

"May I look at this telegram?" Lady Letitia said. "Why," she exclaimed, "it's from Georgie! He is in Southampton; he is coming home—good heavens! can he be wounded?"

"He must be wounded, or sick, or he would not come home," Mr. Lisle said, turning pale.

"But he says in this he is quite well. Look, St. George." She handed the telegram to the Rector.

There was a general movement of wonder, alarm, delight. Mrs. Pollen kept her eyes fixed on Camiola. "She does not care for him," was her conclusion. "He is not the one."

For a moment or two the visitor's card was altogether overlooked and forgotten.

"It must be all right," Mr. Lisle decided. "Georgie tells us that he is quite well. Perhaps the campaign is over. The

papers did not tell us so; but the papers so seldom know anything. Anyhow, he says he is quite well, and we shall know all about it in an hour to two."

Then Lady Letitia took up the card; first glanced at it, and then looked at it with deepened interest.

"St. George, dear," she said to her husband, "it's Kitty Romont's son."

CHAPTER V.

KITTY ROMONT'S SON.

THE only event likely to happen in every-day life which could have turned Lady Letitia's attention for one moment from the expected coming home of her boy was this visit from Kitty Romont's son. She hardly knew how she was to receive him, or how he would receive her. She felt angry with him, and yet penitent about him. Why had he dared to attack the friend and schoolmate of his mother? Why, on the other hand, had the friend and schoolmate of his mother never found time to make his personal acquaintance? Mr. Lisle had long since made up his mind that the young man was perfectly right in what he had done, and was only anxious for a quiet opportunity of telling

Romont so. But he, too, a little dreaded the first meeting, and that in the presence of Mrs. Pollen.

Camiola and Janette were both greatly excited and eager. They were longing to see the young hero, and did not concern themselves about the rights and the wrongs of the controversy he had awakened. They were quite certain that Mr. Lisle must have been right in whatever he said or did; that was a fundamental axiom to rest upon; but they admired the young hero, or were prepared to admire him, without reference to fundamental axioms.

To Mrs. Pollen the whole scene was, as she would herself have said, as good as a play. She was curious to see how Romont would present himself, and how he would be received, and in which of the girls he would seem to take an interest.

Romont was not without his own sense of uneasiness. He did not know how he might be received. He began to think that he had not acted with enough of forbearance and moderation in his denunciation of the evils of

Fitzurseham. Perhaps he ought to have made more careful inquiry into the personal character and local responsibilities of Mr. Lisle. It was not, however, Mr. Lisle he feared, but Lady Letitia. A man, he knew, would always put on some outward and seemly show of courtesy and welcome, but he could not answer for Lady Letitia's feelings. One thing he was quite determined on—he would take anything that might be said meekly and penitentially. So he came into the room with firmly compressed nervous lips and a slight flush on his handsome face, and eyes that looked round the company appealingly. Perhaps he was not a little pleased to see that Mrs. Pollen was there. He knew by instinct that he could count on her. He had quick perceptions, and before his presence had been fully announced he took in and could put a name to every one in the room except Camiola. He had not seen any one of them before except Mrs. Pollen. The Lisle family were never in Fitzurseham while he was there. He was given to wandering purposeless about various out-of-

the-way parts of London, being a man who loved to alternate fits of eager work of some kind with still more delightful fits of indolence and vagrancy. In one of these latter moods he drifted into Fitzurseham, and was captivated by the picturesque desolation of the dreary place, and he came upon Fitzurse House, and made the acquaintance of Pilgrim, and was smitten with a sudden and intense desire to learn shorthand. He had heard that to know shorthand proved the making of ever so many fellows in all sorts of pursuits and all manner of difficulties; and he was always beginning to learn something on this principle, and then, it must be owned, dropping it before he had attained the requisite mastery of it. The truth was, he liked talking with Pilgrim, and he was glad of an excuse for visiting and re-visiting the place. But Pilgrim had not told him much about the Lisles, and only mentioned the fact that they were charged with the introduction into good society of a young woman who had money and not rank, and whom Bertie at once assumed to be fat, ugly, and vulgar,

something like Miss Swartz in "Vanity Fair." He had forgotten all about this young woman when he entered the room, and he could not at first account for the girl, whose appearance strangely impressed him even in the trying moment when he was advancing to meet Lady Letitia.

Lady Letitia was charmed by his bright and frank expression, by the appealing look in his eyes, and the memories which his face brought up.

"Great heavens!" was her exclamation, "how like your mother! I am so glad to see you, Mr. Romont. But no; I can't call Kitty's son, Mr. Romont; I must call you Bertie."

"Dear friend," Romont said, with a certain fervour; for, indeed, he was greatly relieved, and he meant what he said.

It was a treaty of peace and amity struck up on the moment. Lady Letitia, acting on mere impulse and instinct, had done the very best thing possible for all parties. Mr. Lisle gave Romont a cordial welcome. Janette made for the young social hero, friend of his

brother-man, with outstretched hands and eyes beaming with enthusiasm. Camiola was quite prepared to meet him with equal enthusiasm, and would have had no hesitation in telling him so; but there was something constrained, she thought, in his manner when he was presented to her; something quite different from the cordial familiarity with which he took to Janette; and she kept back and demeaned herself somewhat coldly, and presently began to tell herself that he was a good deal too well-dressed and too like an ordinary young West End swell to be her ideal of a hero. "He knows I am not a girl of family," she said to herself; "he does not feel bound to be as civil to me as he is to Janette. Very well; I don't mind."

The truth is simply that Romont had not caught Miss Sabine's name, and was uncertain what he ought to say, and was much impressed, almost for the moment overwhelmed, by her unexpected beauty and grace. This, to be sure, was only for a second's time. He was not exactly the sort of young man to be dumbfounded by a girl's

good looks, and he had seen a few handsome girls before seeing Miss Sabine. But before he had time to pull himself together, Camiola had assumed her cold and distant air, and had withdrawn herself for the moment, metaphorically at least, into the corner. So the first meeting of these two was rather a failure. Mr. Lisle had some earnest talk with Romont about the condition of the Fitzurseham poor and what ought to be done to improve it; but the talk was not long kept up, and was meant only as an overture to other talks on the same subject in private. The general conversation turned a good deal on Lady Letitia's approaching festivities, in which Romont promised to lend all the assistance in his power; but in the success of which he did not pretend to have any great faith.

"You can't bring people together in this country," he said, "the poor and the rich. It isn't coming together; they won't come together. I have seen it tried."

"Oh, please, Mr. Romont, don't talk in that way!" Janette pleaded, almost indig-

nantly. "If I did not believe in the near approach of a time when these ignoble distinctions of money and class are to disappear, I should not believe in anything."

"I don't think it is the fault of the upper classes, or what are called the upper classes," Lady Letitia said; "at least, I am sure it is not all their fault. Some of us don't care about what is called class; but the others won't meet us half way—they won't, indeed, Mr. Romont."

"Don't they sometimes rush to meet you a good deal more than half way?" Mrs. Pollen asked.

"The vulgar rich," Lady Letitia said; "not the poor, never."

"The vulgar rich?" Mrs. Pollen asked, sweetly. "Who are they, now? People like Miss Sabine and myself, for example?"

"Oh, for shame!" Janette exclaimed, turning crimson with anger and agitation.

Mrs. Pollen's was not a pleasant remark, but she did not mean to be particularly pleasant. Lady Letitia's words had been unfortunate, and Mrs. Pollen was determined

to teach her a lesson on the instant and to make her more cautious for the future. Every one looked at Mrs. Pollen, who met their looks with open and beaming eyes and an expression of the most simple and child-like curiosity.

Lady Letitia coloured, and was going to give some angry reply, and then bethought herself and made silent confession of error and determination to offer atonement. Mr. Lisle looked as if he for his part merely asked of the higher powers that the earth might open and swallow him.

"I spoke of the vulgar rich," Lady Letitia said. "There are vulgar rich as well as vulgar poor and vulgar peers. I know some very vulgar peers. I did not speak of educated ladies."

"Of course not, of course not," Mr. Lisle hastily added. "About the way of getting at the poor now, I confess that I am for myself rather inclined to think——"

"But coming back to these vulgar rich," Camiola said, interrupting him in his praise-worthy endeavour to get away from the

unlucky subject. "Can't they be snubbed or chilled off or kept in their places somehow? I should like to have Mr. Romont's opinion on that. He has seen so much of life and all classes of people."

Miss Sabine said this in the spirit of the little boy sung of in "Alice in Wonderland," only to annoy. She knew very well that Lady Letitia never meant to say an unkind thing to any one, and had a very high opinion of her, Camiola. But she still was of opinion that she owed a little grudge to Mr. Romont.

"I think, if Lady Letitia will allow me to say so," Romont replied, "that we all make too much work about the vulgar rich and the new rich, and all that. If we hear that a man has made money rapidly we take it into our heads that he must be vulgar. I know a man—everybody knows him, at least by name—who has an ancestry that can't be disputed, and fortune and rank and all the rest of it, and he is the vulgarest little cad I ever met."

"I know many such cases," the Rector hastened to declare.

"So do I," Lady Letitia added, "and I class them with the vulgar rich. That was all I meant."

It was not exactly all she had meant; but she told herself now that it was, and she believed it; and every one else professed to do the same. So the vulgar rich were allowed to go their vulgar way, and the talk turned back to the forthcoming festivities.

After a while Romont rose to go.

"Are you going to town?" Mrs. Pollen asked. "I am going to Piccadilly; can I drop you anywhere?"

He accepted her offer readily, the more so because he wanted to talk to her.

"We shall see you soon again?" Lady Letitia said to him.

"To-morrow, if you will allow me. I want to give you all the help I can. You have been very kind to me, Lady Letitia." This he said in a lower tone.

"Kind?" she said—"to Kitty Romont's son?"

"Well, do you know, I felt a little alarmed at first."

"You looked a little alarmed," Mrs. Pollen said.

"I did not know how you would take me; I thought you might be angry, perhaps, Lady Letitia. I am afraid I was not as careful as I ought to have been in putting the blame for things here on the right shoulders; and so I came in with a certain fear and trembling."

"Almost like Daniel going into the lions' den," Mr. Lisle suggested.

"Or the three going into the fiery furnace," Lady Letitia added with a smile.

"Or Mark Antony going among the conspirators," said Mrs. Pollen.

"Or Moses in the bulrushes," Camiola observed.

"Why Moses in the bulrushes?" Lady Letitia asked.

"I don't know," Camiola replied composedly. "I heard everybody trying an illustration, and I thought I ought to contribute one; I couldn't think of anything else on the spur of the moment."

The little party soon broke up. Romont

left on the best possible terms with Lady Letitia and Mr. Lisle, and with a promise to return next day and to lend a hand in all the preparations for the coming entertainments. Mrs. Pollen took him away in her carriage.

"So that is Miss Sabine; that is the rich girl they are bringing out?" he said as they drove away.

"That is Miss Sabine. What do you think of her?"

"I think the Fates have dealt most unfairly and unjustly by her, and I think it's a shame."

"How is that? What have the Fates done?"

"They have given her everything—youth and beauty and money, and all the rest. Is not that unfair to other girls? If she has the money she ought not to have the good looks; and if she has the good looks she doesn't want the money, and it ought to be given to some plain girl. These are my principles. I wish I had the arranging of things."

"She hasn't family," Mrs. Pollen said.

"No, she hasn't family. That's a comfort. I suppose she is dreadfully conceited as it is. If she came of some great old family there would be no standing her."

"You don't seem to like her."

"She didn't seem to like me, I thought."

As they were crossing the bridge within sight of the old churchyard a hansom drove past them; its roof was piled with trunks, and in it was sitting a pale young man with delicate features and quick glancing eyes. He looked at them curiously, and even leaned out of the cab to look after them.

"That must be Lady Letitia's son," Mrs. Pollen said. "He is very like Janette. Do you know anything about him? He has just come back from Egypt; he is a soldier."

"No, I don't know anything about him. He seems a delicate sort of lad to be a soldier."

"Perhaps he has come home to marry Miss Sabine," was the suggestion of Mrs. Pollen.

"That fellow?" Romont asked, apparently in surprise.

Mrs. Pollen said nothing; but she smiled and had some thoughts of her own. We are always told—this was one of her thoughts—that only women are jealous of each other and disparage each other, and are suspicious of each other, and all the rest of it; and here is my young philanthropist already at the first glimpse he gets of another young man talking of him as "that fellow," because there is the remotest possibility that he may turn out to be the lover of a girl whom my young philanthropist has seen to-day for the first time in his life, and for whom I suppose he wouldn't admit that he cared a straw. What she said aloud was, "He was looking very pale. I fancy he has been wounded. He will be quite a hero of romance in Fitzurseham, won't he, Mr. Romont?"

"Apparently he has got his heroic renown on easy terms," Romont replied.

Mrs. Pollen was delighted. The little weaknesses of men and women were a source of never-failing interest to her. She liked Bertie Romont all the better in her heart for this little outbreak of jealous feeling.

"Don't think a bit the worse of yourself," she said, "we are all like that. It only shows that you are a man and a brother."

Romont first started, and then laughed.

"You have positively been following my thoughts, Mrs. Pollen. How did you contrive to do that? I was inwardly reproaching myself for a little burst of silly ill-nature."

"Yes; I knew what you were thinking of. Do you like this Chelsea Embankment, with its brand-new red houses?"

"Yes, I suppose so," he answered somewhat abstractedly.

"I don't think you do, really. I don't. I would rather have the old, tumble-down lanes, and the wooden houses hanging rickety over the water, and the old shipyards with the painted figure-heads projecting their staring eyes over the walls, and the ancient, lop-sided public houses rotting themselves in ease on Lethe's Wharf."

"But it was so horribly unhealthy."

"No doubt. The picturesque generally is unhealthy. I don't like all the changes going on in London. Can't they let anything

alone? Is nothing to be allowed to grow old?"

"Yet you are going to restore Fitzurse House, and make it a new and eligible private residence?"

"I suppose I can't escape the spell of what people call the spirit of the age, and I dare say I shall soon be going in for restoration on my own account—powder and paint, and the beautiful-for-ever sort of thing. Do you know, Mr. Romont, I sometimes think there is only one thing on earth worth having."

"What is that?"

"Youth!" she said with energy, her eye lighting up. "Youth! One should never grow old. I often think of Byron's line, 'If thou regret'st thy youth, why live?' Ah, but that was written for a man and by a man! We *have* to live; we women! No land of honourable death for us!"

It was not quite clear what had set Mrs. Pollen thinking of lost youth just now. Perhaps the train of melancholy thought was fired by the words they had spoken about

Camilla and Romont's little ebullition of feeling, inexplicable as it was, against the hero who had come back from the war. Mrs. Pollen said no more on the subject of youth, and Romont, of course, did not prolong the talk. He glanced at her face more than once. The bright sunlight already slanting from the west was a trial to the deepening lines near the mouth, and to the hollows round the eyes. It had been a strikingly handsome face once; and had still a charm that even a young man might acknowledge, in certain lights. But this westering sun was remorseless.

Romont felt stirred by a strange feeling of sympathy, of compassion. "I suppose it is so with women," he thought. "I suppose it must be so. When youth is gone, all is gone.'

Mrs. Pollen probably read his thoughts. She began telling him at once of a number of projects she had in her mind and at her heart for the improvement of this, that, and the other thing at Fitzurseham.

"I shall have to say many times to the

passing hour—stay, for thou art so fair," she added, with a smile.

He understood the allusion to Faust, and he understood her meaning, too. She wished to satisfy him that she was not all as weak as some hasty words might give her out, and that life had much for her even though youth was gone.

CHAPTER VI.

PHANTOMS AND SHADOWS.

"THE dark old place will be gilt by the gold of a millionaire." Mrs. Pollen was spending her gold freely enough; but not so much to gild the dark old place as to bring out anew the splendour of its ancient gilding. She did not hope to have the old place completely renovated in time for what might be called its housewarming. The entrance hall, the staircase, two large rooms and two or three smaller apartments were the utmost objects of her present designs. The teas, the suppers, the wines, and the attendants were to be imported straightway from a great West End caterer, and all that was asked of Fitzurse House was that it should furnish a decent casket for the reception of the com-

pany and the feast. All the old designs and ornamentations were carefully and skilfully brought out anew on walls and roofs. Shepherdesses with sheep, pastors with gilded crooks, which had been hidden for generations in dust and soot, began to simper out upon the living world once more. Goddesses whose nudity had long been concealed by the protecting web of the modest spider shone forth again upon the day naked and not ashamed. Ancient tapestries shook off their dust and displayed their dismal imitations of the painter's art. Lights burnt all through the night in Fitzurse House, and the once deserted chambers resounded unceasingly to the work of the busy carpenters and upholsterers and renovators. People who had been passing up the river every night of their lives in the late steamers without knowing there was such a place in existence as Fitzurse House now stared in wonder at the windows whose light streamed across the water. They could hardly believe their eyes, and asked in amazement what place that was, and why it was lighted up now, having never been

lighted up before. The popular mind of Fitzurseham was nearly as much astonished and agitated as the mind of the sultan in Aladdin's story when he woke up one morning and saw the palace of his son-in-law standing in all but perfect completeness just opposite his own.

"I should like to spend a whole night here," said Mrs. Pollen one evening to her faithful henchman, Christian Pilgrim.

"Yes, madame," the faithful henchman said, and he inclined his head in the attitude of one who deferentially awaits explanation. He was in the habit of spending every night in the house, and had been so for many years, and it did not seem to him to be an experience likely to have great interest for the outsiders.

"I mean when the workmen were all gone; and no one was in the house but myself; not even you, Mr. Pilgrim. I feel sure that after the darkness had set in all round, and in the house as well—for I wouldn't have any lights of my own—I should find the place illuminated with the mild beams of innumerable wax

candles, and should see a stately company filling the great rooms and crowding the staircases, and flirting in the corners and corridors. They would come to the doors in noiseless carriages; and the gentlemen would wear gorgeous full-bottomed wigs and carry swords, and the ladies would have vast hoops and patches, and would play with their fans after the most coquettish fashion described by the *Spectator*. I should not dare to mingle with such a company, for if they saw me all would vanish; but I should peep from my concealment behind a curtain somewhere and see the movements of their dance and perhaps catch some words of their dainty discourse. Would not that be delightful, Mr. Pilgrim?"

"Not for me, madame. I should have no sympathy with those courtly shadows. I should feel that they would never have cared for me, and they would only drive away my own special shadows and phantoms which people the place for me."

"What shadows are these, Mr. Pilgrim, if I may ask? I don't want to know if you don't quite wish to tell me."

She was always unaffected, always herself, when speaking to Mr. Pilgrim.

"Shadows, madame, of all the people and things I have not known, and always wanted to know. Shadows of youth, and—and——"

"And of beauty, Mr. Pilgrim? Why not?"

"And of beautiful people, madame; and of friends, and of children, and of honourable ambition gratified, and of affectionate hopes realized. All that sort of thing."

"Mr. Pilgrim, were you ever young?"

He shook his head and answered gravely, "Never, madame; never."

"Then you must have your youth before you—the best of your life, I mean. Take my word for it, the best is to come. You are young enough in years, and I am sure there is a good time coming for you yet. There isn't for *me;* but that's a different thing. I had my chances, and I didn't make everything of them. But I don't find, from what you tell me and what I guess, that you ever had a chance at all. Now, I am sure you deserve better than this, and so I

feel good hope that you will have it. Anyhow, you said the first day I spoke to you that you had only one friend in the world, didn't you—the time when young Romont came in ?"

"I did, madame."

"Could you say that now ?"

He was for a moment hardly able to speak, out of very gratefulness. His lips moved spasmodically. At last he said—

"I believe—I know—that I have a friend in you, madame, a true friend; and I thank Heaven—and you."

"Come," she said, in a cheerful tone, "that is something. You see, things are improving. Better things will come for you, I am sure. You will grow young, and you will fall in love, and you will find happiness, perhaps, when, where, and how you least expect it. Well, I am going now; I shall be back early in the morning. I leave you to your phantoms for the present; but I hope they will begin soon to vanish and give place to substances, to good things, hope realized, and all that."

Mrs. Pollen had seen the expression that passed over Pilgrim's face when she talked of his falling in love, and she augured well for it. She was thinking of the pretty girl to whom he taught shorthand. "I don't see why that should not be brought about," she said to herself.

Pilgrim had spoken truly to Mrs. Pollen. He had never been young; at least, he had never been a young man. He had been first a child, and then an elderly man. Boyhood and youth he had not known. He had crossed their frontier lines unconsciously, as one asleep in a railway train traverses a country at night. The years which ought to have been boyish he had consumed in working hard for his living, and in studying with passionate zeal meanwhile; rising unnaturally early and sitting up unnaturally late, for the sake of the reading, which was the best of life to him. He found himself once laid up with illness in a provincial town, and the daughter of the woman in whose house he lodged nursed him and was kind to him, and she was a pretty girl—a sort of

pretty girl; and he felt grateful to her, and thought he was in love with her. He married her, and soon found that he had married a worthless little creature with a shrewish tongue and an insatiable thirst for flattery and flirtation. There was no harm in her, however, he thought, and he put up with her ways and was a good husband to her, and worked harder than ever to keep her in dress and in little comforts, and he spent every spare moment with her, although they had not two ideas in common. They had children, but the children all died, and the house was very lonely. It was made more lonely still, and much more dreary for him, when his wife's mother came and lived with them. The mother and daughter were incessantly quarrelling, and used to insist on his hearing out the whole story of each successive quarrel. Once the mother lost her self-control and her sense of decency so far as to make a vile charge against her own daughter in the presence and to the face of that daughter's husband. The mother screamed out that the daughter had been

badly conducted long before she had married Pilgrim. Upon this he insisted that the mother must leave his house at once and for ever; and he had his way. He never saw her again. He never spoke one word to his wife concerning her mother's odious statement. Whether he believed there was any foundation for it or not his wife never knew. Certainly her manner was ever after more quiet and self-restrained and conciliating to him than it had been before. They lived on, to all appearance not unhappily. At last the wife died, and he was sorry for her; sorry for himself, for his loneliness, for his lost youth, for her wasted youth and barren life; sorry when he thought of what she might have been under different conditions. Perhaps he would have been less sorry if he could have looked back on her with pure unalloyed affection; if she could have remained in his memory as the ideal wife of his youth; if he could have thought of his married years with sweet and tender regret. After a while his regrets, such as they were, settled down to a mere sediment at the

bottom of his life's quiet pool. He awoke to the perception of the fact that he was now a prematurely old man; that the time of youth had long since gone by, and that he never had been young. He was forty-four years old, and looked still older than that. The world had nothing more for him, he thought; all was over but the dying; it did not matter when that came.

After a while, however, he became conscious of a strange bewildering sensation growing stronger and stronger within him. It was as if in late autumn the sap were to flow anew in some withered branch, and quicken it into the vitality of spring once more and out of time. He found that his heart was still young, still full of youth's most exquisite feeling; was capable of love, was longing and straining for love. He knew now that he never had loved before, and he felt, with something like terror in the feeling, that he was certain to fall in love. It was the strangest sensation, this lighting up of late passion in premature old age. Well he knew that there was no human

creature in all the land or in all the world that loved him, or was likely to love him. He was sensitive to an almost extravagant degree, and he trembled at the absurdity of the position in which he might be placed if his passion were to take shape, were to centre itself in some one woman—he, at his time of life, to fall in love, and let his folly be seen! Sweet, poetic, and charming in a Cherubino is the sentiment that yearns to be in love with some woman, any woman, to be in love for the sake of being in love. But oh, how unspeakably ridiculous it would be in an ancient or even elderly Dr. Bartolo! There were times when Pilgrim could have cursed himself for the existence of this feeling which was day by day becoming stronger and stronger within him. There were times and moods when in sober seriousness he wished he were safely dead. It was as if a living soul were to be imprisoned in a dead body, thus to feel the emotions of youth, the emotions that his youth had never known, now flushing the feeble veins of age.

Feeble! Was he feeble? More than once he grimly tested his strength and found that he was physically stronger now than he ever had been in his youth or his prime. Sometimes he said to himself impetuously, "I am not old; I will not admit that I am old. After all, I am not yet quite forty-five —that is not old. Why shouldn't I fall in love and marry again if I like, and if I can find any one to love me?" This thought always brought him back to his sober self and made him smile bitterly at his outbreak of folly. He looked in the glass and saw his white hair, his grey beard, his deep-lined and bloodless face, his stooping shoulders, and he asked himself, "What woman on earth could think of me as anything but an old man? I must only grin and bear it," he said. "I am old and I never was young; I am unlike the Psalmist in that respect, at all events." He went about like a man with a terrible secret. The sight, the name, the thought of a woman frightened him; in the approach of any woman there was a possible discovery for his weakness and an exposure

of him to the ridicule which it deserved. For he saw only too clearly that it did deserve ridicule: he ridiculed it himself with quite merciless deliberate scorn. He analyzed his own folly with chill unsparing study; he did not leave one scrap or rag of self-delusion to cover it. He left it naked and ashamed, but it would not die of shame. It lived and thrived and grew stronger day by day. His only hope was that the woman, the one woman, might never come.

Meantime some changes had taken place in the domestic life of the Lisle family. Young Georgie Lisle had come home, and he had been wounded. He had had a thrust of an Arab spear in the neck; he got it not in one of the big encounters, but in a sudden and casual skirmish. It was not a very bad business in itself, but Georgie Lisle was never a robust youth, and his commander thought it better to send him home. Home he came, having managed to conceal from his people any knowledge of what had happened until he was able to show himself in bodily presence among them, and thus assure

them that he had not any dangerous hurt. He was, of course, the hero and the idol of his mother and his sisters; of all the girls, in fact. Camiola petted him and attended to him just as devotedly as either of the other two girls. He was, in appearance, like his sister Janette; he was not much taller, or, to all outward seeming, much stronger than she. His mother watched him with a tender anxiety, different from that of any one else, unknown to any one else. She kept some of her thoughts on this subject even from her husband; but she did in heart wish, oh, so fervently, that her son had not come back to his home and his country until Camiola Sabine had got safely married and out of the way. She did not believe he was at all the sort of man with whom Camiola would be likely to fall in love; she dreaded his falling in love with Camiola, and she shuddered at the bare idea of its being said that she had abused her position as the caretaker of a girl of fortune by trying to make a match between the heiress and her son.

Another change was caused by the frequent visits of Kitty Romont's son. Bertie Romont was of inestimable value in helping Lady Letitia and Mrs. Pollen in everything. It must not be supposed that the Lisles limited their exertions on behalf of the poorer people of Fitzurseham to the getting up of bazaars and concerts. They went about incessantly, sometimes all day long, among the worst of the dens and lairs where poverty is transfigured by daily friction into vice. Many a time Lady Letitia confessed that her heart would have sunk within her for sheer despair if it were not for the never-failing courage and good spirits and hopefulness with which Albert Romont confronted every difficulty and flung defiance in the face of despair.

The young women did not take much part in these expeditions; the lighter duties of charity and beneficence belonged to them; and therefore Romont saw comparatively little of them. His first conversation with Camiola began somewhat oddly. Lady Letitia and he and the young women were

bustling about doing something connected with the grand event of the approaching festivities. Lady Letitia suddenly said, "Where is Camiola? Somebody call Camiola."

Now Romont had accustomed himself to be the somebody who was to volunteer every service, and without giving himself a moment to think about what he was doing he called out, "Camiola, Camiola!" in ringing tenor that all too soon reached Camiola's ears. She had left Lady Letitia for a moment to talk to Georgie Lisle, who seemed to her to look rather lonely on the lawn. Lady Letitia saw her and wanted her back, for various reasons. Camiola ran across the lawn and sprang in at the low window which was open. Girls do not always look well when running, but Camiola did look well, and as she sprang lightly into the room she was a living picture of youth and health and active womanhood. She had hardly noticed who called her, until she saw Romont's embarrassed face. He then became aware that "Camiola" was none other than Miss Sabine, the young lady with the large fortune.

"I am sure I beg your pardon a thousand times," he said. "I really didn't know at the moment; I didn't stop to think."

Camiola was a little vexed. For a moment her usually sweet temper gave way. "Perhaps you thought you were calling Lady Letitia's maid," she said saucily, and giving him a defiant look.

"I didn't think anything; and I beg your pardon again."

"My name is Miss Sabine," said the young lady. "He is presumptuous," she thought to herself, "because he is Kitty Romont's son—whoever Kitty Romont is—and because he knows that I am not of Kitty Romont's class."

"She is a self-conceited, purse-proud young woman," he thought, "and I understand her now." His composure was quite restored. "Your name isn't Miss Sabine, if you come to that," he said good-humouredly. "'Miss' isn't a name, so far as I understand. It is a title, I suppose."

"I have nothing to do with titles," Camiola answered. "I am a plebeian; but I am

called Miss Sabine, all the same;" and at the same moment she said to her own heart, "If I were called Miss Fool for going on in this way I should very well deserve that title." She was angry with herself, and therefore angry with Romont.

"What are you two talking about?" Lady Letitia asked.

"Miss Sabine is vowing eternal enmity to me because I called her 'Camiola.' Won't you protect me, Lady Letitia?"

"I think you are very well able to protect yourself. But why did you call her Camiola, if she doesn't like it?"

"I didn't know who 'Camiola' was."

"That makes it worse," said Camiola.

"So it does," said Lady Letitia. "But you will forgive him, dear, won't you? And he must never call you 'Camiola' again."

"Never again—hear me swear," Romont declared gravely.

Camiola inclined her head. He was laughing at her, she thought; and she also thought it served her right.

The incident was not quite *vidé*, according

side, and you are rude to me on the other. I shan't stay with you any longer, Georgie; I'll come back when you are in a better humour. No; I am not angry with you, silly boy; but I don't like you to be silly. I must go now; Lady Letitia wants me. It is she who calls 'Camiola' this time."

Camiola was sorry for Georgie. He appeared to her to have very little indeed of the hero in him, except that courage which every man can call up when occasion needs. But she reflected that he was sickly, that he was still suffering from the effects of his wound; that he was distressed because he had to come back prematurely from the campaign, and she found various other qualifying conditions telling in his favour or his excuse. He certainly did not show to advantage by the side of Romont. He was not much younger than Romont, and yet he seemed like a peevish child sometimes when brought into comparison with the bright, brave, self-reliant young man, who never appeared to know a moment's doubt or hesitation or ill-humour or despondency.

Somehow, even the soldier's wound did not seem heroic in poor Georgie Lisle.

Lady Letitia and Janette came out on the lawn; Mr. Lisle presently came hurrying after them.

"I am going for a ride with Romont; I shan't be more than an hour, if anybody calls," he said.

"My dear," said Lady Letitia, "if I were you I wouldn't ride with Mr. Romont; he looks so well on horseback."

Lady Letitia was very fond of her husband, and had always been an excellent helpmate to him. But she nevertheless liked to chaff him in a certain good-humoured way, and would even turn him into ridicule before his face without thinking any harm, or supposing that she was detracting in any way from the reverence due to his position in the Church. He was fond of riding, but he certainly never did look well on horseback; his legs did not seem to take hold. He was fond of lawn tennis and other genteel and innocent games, but he played very badly, and put people out. He was fond of talking with bright,

clever girls, and Lady Letitia frequently disturbed and bewildered him by laughingly insisting that he was carrying on a flirtation. Lady Letitia had had the good or bad fortune to have a father and brothers who could do everything well, and whose clothes always looked well on them; and she could not resist the temptation now and then to contrast their ways with the ways of her husband. Moreover, Lady Letitia came of a great old family, rich with titles since ever so long before the Conqueror, while her husband's father was the first peer of the name, and got his peerage because he had been a dull and successful lawyer, whom it was convenient for his party to turn into a Lord Chancellor. The well-assured conviction which Lady Letitia so often expressed that the days of aristocracy in England were over did not by any means prevent her from feeling, and often giving utterance to, a pride in the knowledge that she came of a really aristocratic family, not one of whom had ever known what it was to earn a living.

"Oh, I don't mind," Mr. Lisle said. "So

long as one doesn't fall off, what matter how he looks—at my time of life."

"I don't think Romont rides particularly well," said Georgie. "I should like to see how he would look on a camel."

"You may be sure he has ridden camels scores of times, Georgie," said Mr. Lisle.

"At the Zoo, perhaps," Georgie suggested. "I should like to see him gallop a camel as these Bedouin fellows do, and turn the beast right round when at the very top of his speed. I should like to see him do that."

"Can you do that, Georgie dear?" asked little Alice, gazing on her brother with eyes of wonder and admiration.

"That isn't the question, Alice. We were not talking about what I could do; but what he could do."

"Well, he can do a great many things," Lady Letitia said; "that's certain. So could his mother, Kitty Romont, before she became Kitty Romont. When we were at school she could do everything, and I couldn't do anything. Good gracious, what a stupid girl I was!"

"Perhaps she has changed, too," said the Rector.

Lady Letitia smiled at the delicately insinuated compliment to the more matured condition of her own intellect.

"I am very much disappointed with Mr. Romont," Janette said, and she shook her little grave head with the air of one whose former idol is so utterly broken that it would not be worth while even to try to pick up the pieces.

Georgie looked gratefully at his sister.

"Why disappointed, Janette?" her father asked.

"Because he is not enthusiastic. He doesn't seem to have one thrill of what I call enthusiasm in him; he doesn't believe in the greatness of the present age; he has no real sympathy with its noblest hopes. He does not believe in the coming of a time when all class distinctions and social distinctions are to be levelled, and men and women are to be brothers and sisters. I was much more impressed by Mr. Walter Fitzurse."

"Oh, well, Fitzurse!" Mr. Lisle said

hastily. "He's a good-looking young fellow enough, and I am told he is very clever; but I shouldn't have thought there was much of the enthusiast about *him.*"

"Papa, you haven't talked much to him."

"No, Janette dear; there you have the advantage of me; for I could see that you talked a good deal to him yesterday, and that he talked a good deal to you."

"I think I like him," Lady Letitia said, "for the sake of the great old family he belongs to. I think he is like the portraits of some of them, and like the bust in the church."

Mr. Lisle did not usually say disparaging things of anybody, but he winced occasionally under the not infrequent allusions to great old families, and he could not keep from saying, "As to that, Letitia, I am told by those who ought to know that he has no more to do with that family than you and I have——"

"*We* have something to do with it," Lady Letitia interposed calmly. "Our family intermarried with theirs in the fifteenth cen-

tury; and I think there had been an earlier intermarriage, too."

"I'll say my family, then, and stick to the ground where I know I am safe. I'm told he has no more connection with the historic Fitzurses than I have."

"I should be delighted to think so," Janette said, gravely; "I should like him much better if he had sprung from the people. But I am afraid, papa, you are mistaken. I think you will find he does come from that family, once so famous for its oppression, lately for its vices, and more lately still for the ruin brought upon it by its own prodigality."

"Why, Janette, you are the most eloquent of Social Democrats," her father declared, with eyes wide opening, and a good-natured, amused smile.

"Henry George is not in it with Janette, I should say," Lady Letitia remarked, looking by no means particularly delighted.

"But why do you think I am mistaken, Janette?"

"Well, because—I think—he told me—that he comes of the old Fitzurse family."

"Oh, as to that, from all I can hear——" And Mr. Lisle was about to add something highly disparaging to the value of any statement coming from the lips of the modern Fitzurse, when he pulled up in time, and remembered that it could hardly be right to disparage any one's character on hearsay.

CHAPTER VII.

WALTER FITZURSE.

In one of the wider streets of Fitzurseham there stands a row of small houses, set a little back from the road. These houses are lower down than the level of the street; their foundations have perhaps for some time been going through the unsatisfactory process which is described as "settling"; sinking, that is to say, unevenly down into the soil. Between them and the street is an enclosure, marked off by a rotten fence, or paling. What to call the enclosure is not easy to determine. No doubt the original purpose of the builder was to make it a front garden; but the man who could cast his eyes upon it now, and think of a garden must have a

mind ruled by the oddest laws of association. It is simply a little damp oozy patch of waste, bearing nothing more like to flowers than a few ragged stinted leaves of discoloured grass, and having for its principal ornaments a few old shoes, some scraps of paper, a cork or two, a mouldering tin canister that once held Australian meat, and a few broken bottles.

One of these houses might attract the eye and at first puzzle the mind of a passing stranger by the peculiar import of the inscription on a sign-board which it displays on its front. The sign-board announces that the occupant of the house is a "morning callman," and that he calls persons "at twopence the call or sixpence the week." It might seem surprising that any one in Fitzurseham could have a motive for early rising strong enough to induce him to pay twopence for being called, unless, indeed, he were promised a means of escape from the place for ever on condition he proved himself equal to getting out of bed at some given hour next morning. Even then one would think that such a

person would lie awake all night rather than pay the twopence.

About the time at which we have arrived in this story, Walter Fitzurse was passing the door of the morning callman one bright and beautiful evening. Walter Fitzurse was the young man whose democratic fervour had impressed Janette Lisle. Young Fitzurse was not exactly a handsome man, but he was decidedly what would be called distinguished looking; he was a man upon whom well-made clothes showed to great advantage. There was a curious blending of self-conceit and shyness in his manner. Fitzurseham in general did not like him. He held his head too high, people said; and for no particular reason that any one could see. He had lived all his life in the place, and he hardly ever spoke to any of the aboriginal inhabitants if he could avoid it. He must have been miserably poor, and yet he always contrived to be well-dressed. He was never known to have committed an excess of any kind; he did not care about drinking, or smoking, or flirting, for it was understood that his "keep-

ing company," as it was called, with a pretty girl of the locality was something more than flirtation—was a regular engagement to end in marriage as soon as Walter could find some way of making a living. He had been a brilliant success at the foundation school, and had carried off various prizes and rewards at middle-class examinations. Rumour even said that he was able to keep himself thus far by the money he got in that way. Fitzurseham did not like him, but was very proud of him; and had already determined that Walter Fitzurse was destined to get on and make a great name in the world.

Fitzurse came slowly along the street. One of the complaints which the people made of him was that he walked as if the street belonged to him. He had unquestionably something of this in his manner just now. He looked about him with a lordly, patronizing air, as of one who surveys his property to see if everything is right and in good order. This grandeur of deportment was considerably enhanced by the fact that Walter wore an eye-glass and kept it almost

constantly in his eye, accomplishing this feat without the slightest wrinkle or shade of a grimace. He was in a particular happy mood this day, and he was anxious to communicate his happiness to some one. There was, indeed, a "some one" who had a claim to early communication of any glad tidings he might have to impart, but the opportunity, although close at hand, had not yet arrived, as anybody might have guessed who observed his frequent glances at his watch. He was passing the door of the morning callman when an idea appeared to strike him. He stopped for a moment, then went on a few paces, stopped again, finally turned back resolutely and went up to the door of the house and gave a resounding knock. The door was opened by the morning callman himself, who made a profound obeisance not altogether in the true spirit of deference to his visitor.

"Oh, Merridew, I say, would you be kind enough to call me at six o'clock every morning for the week? I wish particularly to be called, I sleep so late. I am not in the habit of getting up early."

Jethro Merridew, the morning callman, was one of the characters or oddities of the neighbourhood. He was an odd person to look at. Those who remembered him long, knew that he must be at least sixty years old, and might be much older ; but he did not look anything like fifty. He was a short man, with a curiously well-preserved pink-and-white face, and glittering shallow blue eyes. He had yellow hair, which he wore very long, and falling in curling lengths down on his shoulders and on the back of his coat, like a cavalier of the time of the Stuarts out of date or inappropriately clad. His costume never varied. He wore a faded blue cut-away coat, buttoned with one button over a white waistcoat, and black trousers with natty black stockings and dancing shoes underneath. It is not surprising that a get-up like this, worn without regard for time, season, or place, should have started in the popular mind of Fitzurseham a prevailing doubt as to the sanity of Mr. Merridew. Nor was this popular doubt discouraged by the fact that Mr. Merridew had apparently

an immense opinion of himself, his knowledge, and his intellect. He loved to pour forth the treasures of his poetical and other reading without due consideration for the receptive capacity or even the sympathy of his audience; and indeed he not infrequently accompanied his portentous displays of erudition with an expression of the most utter contempt for the faculties or the good opinion of the particular person whom he was then endeavouring to enlighten. But the weakest of all his weak points was, in the opinion of his neighbours,—he had no friends —some absurd notions he had got into his head about a daughter whom he had or believed he had, and who was now lost in some way. This daughter he always said would come back to him some day a great lady. He was always preparing for the girl's return; he read and studied, he assured every one, in order to be properly up to the level of his daughter and her highly educated circle of friends. When she came, of course he would have to go and live in the West End, probably Park Lane or Berkeley Square,

he thought; and a man must be properly read up to make a becoming figure in the society to be met with in these exclusive regions. Had he ever a daughter? Some people said he never had; that he was an old bachelor. On the other hand no one now in Fitzurseham could remember him for more than a few years—he had only migrated or drifted into the place; and he might have had any number of daughters, for aught they knew, before that time. But if he ever had a daughter, and she had suddenly gone away from him, as he said she had, the general opinion of Fitzurseham would not have been that she was likely to return to him metamorphosed into a fine lady. Her fate would have seemed to most persons likely to be something very different, at once tragic and commonplace. Mr. Merridew did not live merely on the profits of his profession of morning callman. Fitzurseham was hardly active and anxious enough in its habits to allow a man to amass much of a fortune by "rousing each caitiff to his task of care—of sinful man the sad inheritance." He was

principally occupied in collecting the rents of small houses, and he did his business, it was said, always methodically and well.

"Wherefore this sudden burst of early rising, oh, my young bird? What earlier worm would you devour?"

"I don't want to devour anything; I want to practise for a few days. I am to take part in the concert."

"What concert; the Concert of Europe?"

"A charitable concert at Lady Lisle's," said the young man, bringing out the name of the lady with a certain blending of pride and shyness.

"Lady Lisle; who's she?"

"You old fool, you know very well; the Rector's lady, of course. What other lady is there here?"

"I see. You mean Lady Letitia Lisle. You are an ignorant young man, although you think you know a great deal. Lady Lisle and Lady Letitia Lisle are not by any means equivalent terms, let me tell you. If you are getting into swell society you ought to learn something of the ways of the aris-

tocracy. Nothing is so awful as to make a mistake in the titles of these people. It stamps a man. Always come to me when you want to know anything of that kind. I have made all that a study. And, listen here, if you are talking to any person of real position in society, don't you go using such expressions as the 'Rector's lady.' Always say the Rector's wife; and leave the Rector's lady to the Rector's lady's-maid."

Fitzurse tried to seem as though he were not annoyed; but he was annoyed. Mr. Merridew's criticism had hit a blot.

"Well, you'll call me at all events, Merridew."

"Yes; I'll call you. 'If you're waking, call me early.' Do you admire the Laureate? 'Call it not vain—they do not err.' That's Scott—Sir Walter—they don't read him now. *I* do. 'Call spirits from the vasty deep.' That's the Immortal Bard. They don't read *him* now, either; but they say they do. 'Call up him who left untold the story of Cambuscan bold;' that's Milton.

They say they admire him, but they don't. Shall I go any further with the calls?"

"Not on my account, thank you, Merridew, I'm sure. Much obliged for the specimen of your reading in the poets."

"Merridew? Merridew? And why not now, Mr. Merridew? Lady Letitia Lisle—Lady Lisle you would call her; or perhaps I should say you would have called her—always addresses me as Mr. Merridew. Mrs. Pollen, the great rich woman that's having Fitzurse House done up for her—she wrote me a note, and she addressed me as 'Dear Mr. Merridew.' A word to the wise, eh—only, God bless me! there is not much of the wise about you. So you are invited to Lady Letitia's? Well, well! What is this world coming to?"

"Do you know Mrs. Pollen?" Walter asked the question with seeming carelessness, taking no account of Mr. Merridew's somewhat disparaging observation on the probable destiny of the world.

"Know her? Of course I know her. She was good enough to express a wish that

I should be introduced to her. Now there is a real lady for you!"

Fitzurse smiled quietly. He had been given to understand that whatever else Mrs. Pollen might be she was not exactly a real lady, and he was amused at poor Merridew's words. Mr. Merridew saw the quiet smile, and was made angry by it.

"Of course, you are a great authority on the ways of the higher classes, Merridew," Walter observed, still with the smile.

"I am, sir," Merridew said, blazing out into wrath as sudden as a fire of straw. "I am, and I have a right to be. I study the ways of the higher classes that I may be fit for their society when it is the will of Providence to call me among them."

"Oh yes, I know; when your daughter comes back in a carriage of mother-of-pearl drawn by eight milk-white horses. We know all about that, Merridew, my boy."

"Who are you, sir, that talks in this way about me and my daughter? Ain't you the son of the old copying clerk who used to get drunk at the Old Ferry Inn yonder?"

"Come, Mr. Merridew, you are getting scurrilous."

"Ain't you keeping company with poor old Mrs. Lammas's daughter?—unless, perhaps, you mean to chuck the girl up now because you've been asked for once to meet women of rank. It would be just like you! You call yourself Fitzurse, and you pretend you are one of the old Fitzurse family—which you are as much as I am. Why, you never had a grandfather, and your father only borrowed the name of Fitzurse. My daughter will be a lady when thou liest howling!"

Walter had left the place in contemptuous silence, while Merridew was still pouring forth all his eloquence of denunciation. Even after the morning callman had shut out the world by returning to his house and closing his door with a bang, he still kept on relieving his mind at the expense of Fitzurse, Fitzurse's name, family connections, person, character, and social prospects. Walter went his way and walked slowly along the road that led to the river and the old churchyard

upon its bank. One of the smaller gates of the churchyard was open, and he went in. It was a soft evening of a summer not yet advanced into heat. The sky was silvery grey towards the horizon; grey-blue overhead. The faint sun was sinking behind silver-edged clouds. The place was lonely. The young man sat on the low wall and looked to where on clearer evenings the spires and domes of London could be seen.

"How can one live in this accursed place?" he said audibly, "and see London so near?" Then he looked anxiously back across the churchyard as if afraid that some one might have heard his words. There was no one there as yet but himself. He was evidently expecting some one. He looked at his watch. "Past the time," he said; "distinctly past the time. Nearly five minutes late." As he was uttering the words he heard the gate open softly and close again, and he heard the sound of feet coming towards where he was seated. He did not get up; he remained just as he was, and affected to be buried in thought and to have heard no

sound until a girl ran up to him and put her hand upon his shoulder.

"You naughty boy! you did not come to the gate to me; you sat there thinking and thinking, and I dare say not thinking of *me* one bit. No, nonsense; don't—I won't, Walter; you ridiculous thing."

Miss Vinnie, or Vincentia, Lammas was a decidedly pretty girl. She had dark curly hair and twinkling eyes, and a particularly winsome little mouth and chin. She was dressed neatly—what Fitzurseham would have called genteelly; but the experienced eye would have detected the fatal evidences of poverty about the very neatness of her attire. There was something pathetic in the little worn gloves, frayed at the finger ends; and one could almost imagine a highly sympathetic creature being touched to the heart by the little boots which were going down slightly on one side. Miss Vinnie herself did not appear to be thinking of these things or of anything that would diminish her good spirits. Her eyes danced with pleasure as she came up to her lordly

lover, who was indeed impatient for her coming, but chiefly because he wanted to tell her his good news.

They began walking up and down the churchyard along the line of the river wall. Much of their talk turned on the approaching concert, to which Vinnie had, of course, been invited. She was well known to Lady Letitia, who always spoke of her as "a nice respectable little girl—the daughter of a very proper, decent mother." Vinnie was beginning to make some suggestions to her lover about the time he was to call for her to take her to the concert; and here now was the opportunity for Walter to tell her his piece of good news. He had been longing for the chance; and now he let it out with the most careless and casual manner as if it were something hardly worth the telling.

"Well, the truth is, I couldn't very well take you in any case, because I shan't be going at the same time. Lady Lisle—Lady Letitia"—he suddenly bethought him of Mr. Merridew's correction—"has asked me—has been kind enough to ask me to dinner

that day—and of course I suppose I must go," he added, with heroic attempt to appear more or less indifferent on the subject.

"Asked you to dinner? Lady Letitia? Oh, you lucky, lucky boy! I say, Walter, how I do envy you! Fancy—dining there with all these swell women."

"Yes; very kind of her, wasn't it? I suppose I must go?"

"Go? Why, of course you must go—what else would you think of doing? I feel quite proud, Walter, to know such a grand young man. I say, you must look your very best. We must get mamma to throw her whole soul into the shirt question for that occasion—and you must let me make you a present of a pair of gloves. I want you to look splendid. I hope there will be other young men there—young swells—a lot of them."

"Why do you hope that, Vinnie?"

"You goose, can't you guess? Why, of course, in order that you may look so much handsomer, and cut them all out with the ladies, and make them awfully jealous. I

know there won't be any of them half so handsome. I *must* give you the gloves."

"I rather think, my dear girl, gloves are not worn now by gentlemen at dinner-parties."

"Oh, well, you must have gloves, anyhow; and if you don't see any of the swells putting them on, you can keep yours for another time. You are sure to do whatever is right —you have the way of it always. Mamma says it runs in your family. I'm sure it don't run in hers or mine. Walter, I am so delighted."

Now perhaps, on the whole, this way of taking his news was a little disappointing to Walter. He was afraid at first that the girl would be displeased, or jealous, or alarmed at the thought of his going into this inner circle of brilliant society without her. He had not expected anything of the childlike and simple joy with which she had heard of his invitation. Her way of taking it was a relief to be sure in one sense; but in his heart he would have liked her to be a little jealous and frightened. He had hopes of giving her just a little pain and alarm; or impress-

ing her practically and effectively with a sense of his superiority and of the social distance which must be growing greater and greater between them. It spoiled all this when she received his news with mere delight and pride.

"I suppose I shall meet Miss Sabine," he said; "I have not seen her yet. They say she is very rich and very handsome."

"She's awfully handsome. I saw her at church on Sunday; and so is Miss Lisle, I think. Don't you attempt to make love to either of these swell ladies, Walter—or do, if you like, my dear, I shan't be jealous; only I hope they won't make love to you; that would be more serious, wouldn't it?"

Apparently there was no making this girl jealous.

"I have talked to Miss Lisle," he said. "She is very nice and very clever. We agree in many of our opinions on social questions."

"Do you really? Why, Walter, I never knew that you had any opinions on social questions. What are social questions? Why

don't you ever talk to me about social questions? I am not clever, I suppose; I couldn't understand. Is that it, you self-conceited boy? And you know Miss Lisle already? Where did you see her?"

"I saw her at her house. I have been to call there, once or twice. She talks to me a good deal. They are very easy to get on with, these aristocratic women, I find."

"And you never told me you had been there or met her," Vinnie said, with a certain distinct reproachfulness in her manner, as if now for the first time she did begin to entertain a misgiving.

"Didn't I tell you before? I must have forgotten. Oh yes; I was there. They were all very kind."

"Miss Sabine; did you see Miss Sabine?"

"No. I told you I haven't seen Miss Sabine yet. I am very anxious to see her. Janette Lisle speaks very highly of her."

"Is Janette Lisle Miss Lisle, Walter?"

"Yes, Vinnie; the eldest Miss Lisle. Janette is her name. Very pretty name, don't you think?"

"Yes," said the girl, rather blankly. A chill had come over her. Walter had not acomplished his purpose of making her jealous; but he had made her uncomfortable. She had not the faintest idea of distrusting him; but she began to distrust herself. How could she ever look well in his eyes, after those eyes had been accustomed to gaze on girls like Miss Sabine and Miss Lisle? He was much too good for her in any case; but up to this time he had hardly seen any girl but her.

Now, however, that Walter saw he had made her uneasy he was satisfied with himself, and he set to work to restore her spirits and her confidence in herself again. This was easily done. He talked to her pettingly and lovingly, and she thought she had never seen him look so noble and splendid, and had never heard his voice sound more sweetly. His caressing words had a new charm to her because of the knowledge that he had spoken to great ladies and found favour with them. There was no one near, the churchyard was lonely save for those

two, and as they walked up and down Walter kept his arm round the girl's waist. When the skies began to deepen, and it was time for Vinnie to go home, he took her in his arms, and looking cautiously round to see that there were no observers near, he kissed her lips. This seemed to be the recognized signal for their leaving the churchyard. Vinnie put up her lips for the kiss. Then they passed out of the gate, and from self-confessed lovers became an ordinary pair of wayfarers again. Walter walked with her to her door, and left her in a condition almost tearful for very pride and happiness.

Walter Fitzurse had lived all his life in the region where we find him. His father and mother had long been dead. In a lonely way the boy grew up to be a man. He was intensely self-conscious, as one usually is who has spent his early years in such a place and such a manner. He was vain and ambitious. He yearned and pined for worldly success, and, above all, for social distinction. He had convinced himself that he was destined for success in that way, and fed in his loneli-

ness on the assurance of what the future had in store for him. His favourite heroes were "Vivian Grey" and one or two of Balzac's brilliant adventurers. He had some capacity, he was clever, he could do most things well when he gave his mind to them, but he had not as yet done anything especially well. If he had been brought up at some great public school or had any opportunity of mixing much with other boys he would have had his measure taken, he would have had his unwholesome self-conceit reduced in its dimensions, and, perhaps, he would as a result have applied himself steadily to some one pursuit and won distinction in it. But there were very few boys in the old foundation school during his time, and the few that were there were so preternaturally stupid that their presence and companionship only served to give Fitzurse still further assurance of his own intellectual greatness. He was something of a musician, something of a draughtsman. He had a certain taste for literature, he had an aptitude for learning modern languages, he was a good fencer, and

the result of all this was that he found himself at twenty-three years of age absolutely without any pursuit or occupation, and with his scanty resources running rapidly out. Then he made up his mind that he had better go to the bar, and in order to get to the bar he would have to make his way into literature; and in order to make his way into literature, he proposed to pass through the iron gate of journalism. For this purpose he was taking lessons in shorthand from Christian Pilgrim. The ladder of success was all to be climbed as yet. He had not even put his foot upon the lowest round of it. Vivian Grey had done wonderful things at a much earlier age. That Walter sorrowfully admitted. But he reminded himself at the same time of the immense advantages over him which Vivian Grey had to start with. Even the neediest of Balzac's youths had advantages over him.

However, he was going on now; and the success would come. He would master shorthand; he would get an engagement on some London paper; he would write some

brilliant thing which would attract attention to his literary genius; he would get literary employment; he would make money. Then would come the time to make his final choice for letters and politics combined; or law and politics combined. But the time to make the choice had not exactly come as yet, and he went on learning the shorthand. He had taken the idea of the shorthand from Vinnie Lammas, who was in hopes of being able by its acquirement to get an engagement as secretary or amanuensis to some great lady. He had known Vinnie and her mother several years, and he had for more than two years been Vinnie's recognized lover. They were to be married when he saw himself in a fair way to make a living. Meanwhile the girl and her mother were quite willing to wait. They both believed in him to the full. At first indeed Vinnie used to be rather amused by his airs and his ambitious flights; but he was very clever, and in her eyes he seemed an astonishing genius, and he was good-looking, and had a graceful figure and ways that would impress and impose upon a

girl. So she ended by believing that there was no one in all the world like him. He began by being very fond of her; although he had plunged into the love-making partly because it seemed to him that the heroic and romantic part he was playing required to have a love-adventure thrown in. Then he found something intensely gratifying to his self-love in the admiration, the devotion, the dependence of this pretty girl. When she sometimes dwelt on her lowly birth and poor intellectual qualifications it seemed to him that he was indeed a generous creature, and out of very admiration for himself he came to feel a new admiration for her.

Walter had one enjoyment which he did not share with her, of which he never told her anything. It was a very harmless enjoyment, and yet he would not for anything have allowed her to know of it. Many a night when he was quite a boy he used to strain his eyes from the river's bank to see the lights of London fusing themselves into a deep mass of glowing colour in the distance. There among those lights was to be his

future field of struggle and of success. Lately, however, he had made it his habit of nights in the season to go to London, to haunt the West End, to wander up and down Piccadilly and St. James's Street, and Park Lane, and other thoroughfares in the same enchanting region. He was happy for the time in pacing these streets and picturing in his mind the career that he felt sure was before him when he should be a celebrity—a man of fashion and a regular inhabitant of the West End. Sometimes he even mounted the steps of some great club and stood there for a few moments and calmly surveyed the street and the crowd beneath, and tried to make himself believe that he was a member of the institution. He was a sort of poet, perhaps, although he did not write verses; a poet of keen but limited aspiring, a poet whose most soaring imagination took him into and not out of the world of prose. The heaven of heavens into which he presumed, an earthly guest, was the West End of London; the imperial air he desired to draw was the atmosphere of a fashionable drawing-

room. He fed and pampered his yearnings until they became the highest motive and the supreme law of life for him.

Often did he spend long hours of the day in the old church by the river. He did not care for the beauty of the scene; he only went to gaze upon the monumental bust of the great man who lay buried there, and of whose illustrious family he had now finally elected himself a member. Vinnie Lammas knew of this favourite occupation of his, and thought it very high-souled and heroic. It grew to be a habit of hers to look for him in the church or the churchyard every evening. His love and his hopes made her very happy. Until she loved him and came to believe that he loved her, she had led a stinted, frozen sort of life. His love warmed the atmosphere and expanded the horizon of her existence. At one time she used to be discontented and complaining, and used to speak with scorn and bitterness now and then of the pinched and mean kind of struggle which she and her mother had to make. Since she and Walter had come into companionship her voice had

no note of discontent in it. Her happiness made the poor little home all sunny. Her lover sometimes came to have tea at Mrs. Lammas's—not the five o'clock tea of modern civilization; Mrs. Lammas did not admit such innovations—the good old-fashioned meal of tea and bread and butter which comes long after the early dinner. Then Walter sang to them and played to them; and when he was going away Vinnie stood on the doorstep with him for ever so long, and her mother did not object or rebuke. These were happy hours, and while they were hers Vinnie was not merely happy—she knew that she was happy.

CHAPTER VIII.

LOVE LIES BLEEDING.

The little dinner-party at Mr. Lisle's went off very pleasantly for most of those who took part in it. It was early, very early; for the company had all to go off to Fitzurse House for the concert, and late hours were not kept in Fitzurseham, at least by the respectable inhabitants, by those who took any account of hours at all. The party was small; Mrs. Pollen, Romont, and Walter Fitzurse being the only guests. Mr. Lisle took in Mrs. Pollen; Romont had Lady Letitia; Fitzurse was proud and delighted to be asked to offer his arm to Janette; and Georgie Lisle had the happiness of Camiola's company. Lady Letitia asked Romont a great many questions about his mother, her

old schoolfellow, in whom she felt a reviving interest. They had not met for ever so many years, and probably would never have met again in their ordinary course of existence. They did, however, really like each other; but people in English society are apt to drift away thus into different channels, and not to be wafted or driven together any more. Mrs. Romont lived a good deal in the country and with her elder son, and only came to London now and then.

"Your mother must be very uneasy about you when you start off on one of these dreadful enterprises in emigrant ships and places," Lady Letitia said.

"She's got used to it, I think. She has seen me come back all right so often that now she expects me to turn up in the usual way. You see, Lady Letitia, you let your boy go away to the war in Egypt; lots of fond English mothers do just the same, and you don't mind it much——"

"Oh, don't we?" Lady Letitia interposed, with a shudder.

"Still you do it; because it is the custom,

and because you think it is right—and I don't see what a country would be worth if it hadn't mothers like that. Well, my mother begins to look on my goings-on in the same light; and I suppose she has a firm belief that there's a sweet little cherub who sits up aloft, to keep watch for the life of poor Jack."

"It all seems so strange," Lady Letitia said. "We were schoolgirls the other day, and now here am I talking to Kitty's son, and about my own son. Please don't get married for a long time; it would be too awful to think of Kitty's grandson."

"Not much chance of my getting married—besides, where should I find a wife as indulgent to all my ways as my mother is?"

"You would have to give up all your fads—I beg pardon, I mean all your philanthropic enterprises, then. A wife wouldn't stand your coming home to her every now and then after spending a week in a fever den."

"No," Romont answered gravely; "I could hardly expect that, could I? Then, besides, a wife would always keep me waiting,

wouldn't she? And I could not light a cigar and walk home from the theatre or the opera. I should have to go home with her in the growler, or the omnibus, according to the state of our finances; and she would be out of temper a good deal."

"I don't see why she should be out of temper," Lady Letitia remonstrated.

"I don't see it either," Romont answered; "but she would be all the same. Don't you think so, Miss Sabine?" he asked defiantly, for he saw that Camiola, who sat just opposite to him, had suddenly ceased from her talk with Georgie Lisle and was looking fixedly at him.

"I am sure *I* should be if I were she," Camiola answered, defiantly also. "I should never be able to keep my temper with any one who started with a preconceived idea that all women lose their temper."

"You would show him he was wrong by showing him he was right?" Romont asked, with a smile.

"I would give him 'reason to cry,' as the nurses say to the children sometimes."

"What would you do if you lost your temper, Miss Sabine?" Mrs. Pollen asked. "How would you show it?"

"Throw things, I suppose," Camiola answered placidly.

"I thought as much," said Mrs. Pollen. "There is a girl who positively knows nothing about it, and evidently never lost her temper in her life. I *do* know how a woman vexes a man when she loses her temper; and I know it isn't by throwing things."

There was a moment's pause, after which Janette was distinctly heard to say, in a voice of intense earnestness—

"You *do* believe with me, Mr. Fitzurse, in the coming of a great day of equality for human beings on this earth?"

Walter Fitzurse found his head swimming for sheer happiness at this dinner-table. It was his first dinner-party, the first time he had ever worn a dress suit in private life. He had felt nervous in the beginning, but was quite surprised now to find how well he was getting on, and how much he was at his

ease. As the eyes of the servant are fixed on the hands of the mistress, so were Walter's eyes fixed for a while on the small thin hands of Janette Lisle, in order that he might be guided by her example in all his movements of fork and spoon and napkin. He began by following her example in the matter of food, declining the courses she declined and the wines she would not have. But he soon found that this example would never suit his healthy appetite, for she hardly ate or drank at all. Therefore he took his cue from Romont, who ate and drank everything and talked all the time.

"What a delight there is in being in society—really in society!" Walter said to his gratified heart. He had already created himself an aristocrat; now, to please Janette Lisle, he was creating himself a Republican. What of that? Are not aristocrats often the most advanced Republicans? Was there not Philippe Egalité? Were there not Byron and Mirabeau, and ever so many others?

"And do you not agree with me," Janette said, "in hating the miserable distinctions of

class and the frivolous ways of the thing we call good society?"

Walter promptly assured her and himself that if there was one object of his scorn for which he felt more contempt than any other it was the frivolous thing which we call good society.

"One seldom exchanges a true word there—a word from the heart and the soul," Janette said, warming with her own earnest eloquence, and happy in the conviction that she had found in him a kindred spirit.

Walter entirely agreed with her; but he did not explain that until that night society had never afforded him an opportunity of exchanging a word, true or otherwise, with anybody belonging to it. Already, therefore, he was reaching a third stage of his career. He was becoming weary of society, and he was as yet only half through his first dinner-party.

Georgie Lisle was not very happy. He was trying to absorb Camiola, and he feared he was not successful. She made several efforts to get into the general conversation

and to draw him into it as well. He would not be drawn in, and she could not leave him out; and, therefore, she had always to return to her talk with him. He was afraid he was boring her, and that she sometimes hardly listened to what he was saying, and yet he could not give up his attempt to keep her all to himself. He was disappointed; he thought he ought to have been more of a hero in Camiola's eyes. Sometimes he longed to be back again in Egypt. He often wished the Arab spear had finished him off altogether. Would she have really cared for him then, and regretted him, and shed tears over his early grave? The poor youth was almost inclined to shed tears over himself.

Mrs. Pollen observed all that was passing, and she read poor Georgie's little story as clearly as if it had been put into print. She pitied him. She had a great tenderness for young men; but she did not think him much of a hero, and the idea of his being the lover of the superb Camiola seemed to her utterly absurd.

"The more he bores the girl," she thought,

"the better for him and for her; it will bring the matter more quickly and more surely to an end."

She resolved that so far as she could influence things Georgie Lisle should have the fullest opportunity of boring Miss Sabine during the whole of that evening's entertainment. She was much interested in Walter Fitzurse and Janette. She knew as well that that was Walter's first experience in society as if he had told her. She followed and understood every furtive glance of his at the movements of his neighbours. But she rather liked his flexibility, his adroitness, his courage, and his faith in himself.

"How if he were to turn out to be the long-lost relative?" she thought. "I should be glad. I think he is a young man who would go far if he got a good start. If he wants it he shall have it. I'll give him a chance."

She took her imperious way with him; she knew it would be the right way in this case. As the ladies were leaving the dining-room she spoke a passing word or two to him.

"I have not had a chance of saying anything to you, Mr. Fitzurse. Come and talk to me in the drawing-room."

This was spoken in her very best tragedy-queen style, and it greatly impressed Fitzurse.

There was only a formal sitting of the gentlemen after dinner—a cigarette half-smoked; nothing more. Walter went up to the drawing-room feeling a little anxious. Mrs. Pollen at once signalled to him to come near her. He went and sat by her. He was somewhat in awe of her dark eyes, her dark draperies, her diamonds, and her white shoulders. She was still a handsome woman with a commanding air, when it suited her humour to put it on. She looked much more like his original idea of an aristocrat than the aristocrats themselves. He did not speak; he waited to be spoken to. He had read or heard somehow that that was the proper way to behave with queens and princesses, and this was at least a social princess.

"Mr. Fitzurse," she said in a voice that went through him, but which no one else heard, "I should like to talk to you, but not

here. I am interested in you. Come and see me to-morrow, in Dover Street, Piccadilly. That will do now; go and talk to Miss Lisle."

So she dismissed him, and he went to Miss Lisle, hardly knowing what he was saying or doing. The very words, "Go and talk to Miss Lisle," were such a recognition of the reality of his position, such an indication of a sort of acknowledged bond of companionship between him and Miss Lisle, that he felt as if he were becoming almost too great and too happy all in a moment. There was not much time to talk to Miss Lisle then, however, for the whole company was speedily whirled off to Fitzurse House to take part in or look on at the evening's performances. But Walter found more than one opportunity during the performances of saying a word to Miss Lisle. Janette was most innocent in her earnestness, and her eyes paid him the compliment of sparkling with pleasure whenever he came near her. He could not but see this, and it made him intoxicated with utter happiness.

Fitzurse House had seen many a brilliant

company in its great days, but it had never seen a company so curiously assorted as that which gathered beneath its ancient roof-trees this night. There was rank in the person of Lady Letitia, there was wealth in Mrs. Pollen's splendid dress and rivers of diamonds, there was Camiola, the girl with the fortune, and there were Vinnie Lammas and Vinnie Lammas's mother, and Christian Pilgrim. There were the smallest of small shopkeepers and their wives and daughters, and the young men who were paying attention to the daughters; and there were a great many working men and greengrocers, and their decent and subdued womankind, who enjoyed everything, but hardly ventured to speak their joy aloud. Lady Letitia and Mrs. Pollen jointly received the company. Lady Letitia had insisted on this, and when Mrs. Pollen was for leaving all the honour to Lady Letitia, an appeal was made to the decision of Romont.

"Oh, you had better help Lady Letitia," he said. "It's partly 'your shout,' you know, as they say in Australia."

"Partly my shout?" Mrs. Pollen asked; "as they say in Australia? And what might that mean? I have never been in Australia."

"Well, your shout; that means your treat."

"Very good; very expressive. Then Lady Letitia and I will shout together." So it was settled.

Romont constituted himself, or was constituted by the natural fitness of things, master of the revels. His principal head assistant was Christian Pilgrim. Christian did everything slowly, methodically, and with pale face of unabated gloom. Romont was always quick and energetic in his movements, and seemed to go on as if everything he did brought vigour and enjoyment with it. One luckless man managed to come very drunk to the place; he was a carpenter from one of the lowest parts of Fitzurseham, and he seemed likely to make a disturbance. Christian endeavoured to get him to keep quiet or to go away, but could not prevail over him in the slightest, and came to Romont in despair and dismay. Romont sought out the delinquent.

"Look here, old pal," he said, in a rough, good-humoured way, "this will never do, you know. You have been having too much beer, haven't you? Come along with me; a quiet smoke in the open air will do you no end of good. You are not half a bad sort, I know. Come along."

With good humour and a little gentle pressure he got the inebriate out into the grounds in a moment, and there gave him into the charge of a decent but withal sympathetic working man, lenient to mortal weaknesses, who undertook to get the bemused comrade safely home.

This was the only hint of disturbance or interruption to the evening's performances. The performances consisted of vocal and instrumental music, with interjected recitations and some "living pictures" of a very simple and intelligible order. Walter Fitzurse took part in various concerted pieces; so did Lady Letitia and both her daughters. Camiola did not play or sing well enough, she insisted, to do either in public. Vinnie Lammas was one of the chorus in a piece

wherein also Walter took part. She was looking very pretty and pleased; thus far everything had been pleasant to her. She was delighted even to see Walter talking with apparent familiarity to Miss Lisle. Walter had not much opportunity, up to this time, of saying many words to Vinnie. Bnt Vinnie was content to wait. He would come and talk to her by-and-by, and in the mean time she was satisfied with the belief that his heart was with her always. She was dressed very neatly, but to Walter's eyes shabbily; and she had on some cheap little ornaments which did not seem by any means becoming, he thought. Mrs. Pollen observed Vinnie, was attracted to her in the first instance by her prettiness, and then by the fact that every other moment Vinnie's eyes turned to where Walter happened to be standing or sitting. It did not escape her observation that Walter by no means reciprocated this attention, but on the contrary seem to avoid looking in Vinnie's direction. Romont talked to everybody, talked a good deal to Vinnie, whom he remembered to have seen before, and talked

to her mother, which much delighted them both.

Camiola found herself watching Romont and his movements with an interest which sometimes almost alarmed her. More than once she hurriedly turned her eyes away, as if she had no right to look at him, and then found herself seeking him with her eyes again. She saw how he contrived to get quietly rid of the poor drunken fellow; she saw how kindly his manner was even to this unprepossessing creature, whom Camiola would have shuddered at if he were near her. She saw how he talked to Vinnie Lammas and to Vinnie's mother; how he had a sweet friendly word for every one; how absolutely free of any hint of patronage his manner was to the very humblest; how many eyes of young and old brightened when he spoke to their owners; how the old women and the children liked him. For some reason which she could not explain she felt once as if tears were coming into her eyes. She thought if she could be a man she should wish to be such a man as that.

Once he was passing near her, and she could not keep from saying a word to him.

"Oh, Mr. Romont, I am so sorry. I am afraid I was very rude to you." Then she felt herself growing red.

"Rude to me, Miss Sabine? No; not a bit of it. I don't think you could be rude if you tried."

"Yes; I didn't try, but I *was* rude. To-day at dinner, about women losing their temper, don't you remember; and the other day when you called out my name. I was rude. I am very sorry. I think it was horrid of me. Won't you forgive me?"

Romont looked into the girl's eyes—her frank, friendly, yet now somewhat shrinking eyes, and he answered her with perfect gravity. "It is very kind and sweet of you to look at things in that way. I don't think you were rude; I am sure you were not. But I know you were a little annoyed at my stupid blunder, and I don't think I went the right way about making up for it. I feel ever so much obliged to you for speaking so nicely about it now."

"And you do forgive me?"

"Oh yes; I do forgive you, if there was anything to forgive, and if you say there was; but it must be an exchange of forgiveness. You forgive me, don't you?" He added, in his own mind, and to himself, "And I'll never call you Camiola any more, I suppose; any more."

One might have almost fancied she knew what he was saying to himself, for she flushed slightly, and said in an embarrassed sort of way, "Oh yes; of course. And we are friends again?"

"We are friends," he said. "I don't say again. I am sure we were never enemies."

Then Georgie Lisle came up and "froze on" to Camiola, and Romont went on and talked to some one else.

Meanwhile the party was not "going" somehow. Mr. Lisle did his best to get into conversation with people, but could not make much of it. The company generally did not get on with each other. There was no fusion, no mingling or blending.

"Can't we manage to stir these people up

a little more?" Mrs. Pollen asked of Romont. "This entertainment is like the materials for a plum-pudding thrown together into a bag without skill to blend or heat to boil them."

"This sort of thing is always a failure," Romont said. "It must be so; it couldn't be anything else in a place like this. It is meant to bring people of different classes together, and they won't come together. It is an attempt to make people think they are on an equality for the hour, and they know they are not on an equality, and what's the good? The poor find themselves poorer than ever when they see you smart women with your lace and your diamonds."

"I am sure I would have left my laces and my diamonds at home if that would have made things any better."

"But it wouldn't. They would know that you had them all the same. Half the girls here are ashamed of their poverty now, and are hiding themselves away behind doors and in corners, and I am certain they would have thought themselves and their dresses

perfection if they were at some little tea-party of their own. I have been talking to a nice little girl over yonder, and all the time she kept glancing now at Miss Sabine's dress and now at her own, and I could see that she was ashamed of her own poor little fineries, although I dare say she and her mother thought she was dressed fit for a palace when she was setting out this evening. Equality? Stuff! Do you think anything on earth would make that girl believe that she is on an equal footing socially with Miss Sabine? Ten to one if the girl has a sweetheart here he thinks less of her now than he did this afternoon. There will be some love-affairs spoiled here this evening, you may be sure; that will be one of the results of your patronage."

"Don't say my patronage. I never patronized anybody, unless some one who was trying to patronize me. You are an odd sort of young man, but there is some sense in what you are saying. I like the whole affair, however; it is as good as a play to me. It is a play, and I am only a looker-on. All

life is a play to me now, and nothing more. I am not a philanthropist."

"You are a deceitful woman," said Romont. "You are a fraud; that is what *you* are. You took me in at first, but now I have found you out; I have unmasked you, as the people say in plays."

"What is the young man talking about now?" Mrs. Pollen exclaimed.

"Yes; it is quite true. You told me yourself that you were egotistic and selfish, and I don't know what else, and that you cared nothing about your fellow man or woman. Don't I know now that you pass all your days and half your nights, I dare say, plotting and scheming and planning how to do somebody a good turn? Don't talk to me; I know you! So does my pal, Christian Pilgrim; *he* has found you out! That's not all—he has become your accomplice; he told me so."

"Well, well," Mrs. Pollen said, not ungratified by his words, "time will unfold me and we shall see. Meanwhile it looks a lovely night, and the moon is up. Will you

take me for one turn in the grounds or the gardens, or whatever they are called?"

They passed out of the crowd and into the quiet of the outer air. Camiola and Georgie Lisle were already in the garden; had been wandering about there for some minutes. Camiola was not listening with deep attention to her companion's words. Her mind was a little distraught to-night. Almost for the first time in her life she was beginning to feel unhappy.

Suddenly Georgie came to a stand, and said, "Do you think I am a coward, Camiola?"

She turned on him a look half amused, half surprised; not in the least serious.

"Yes; do you think I am a coward?" He looked painfully in earnest.

"Why, you silly boy, who ever thought of such a thing? Of course I don't; but, do you know, I don't fancy any man is really a coward in that way. I think they'll all fight if you get them into uniform and put them under leaders. I don't think much of that sort of courage. I dare say women would do just the same if it were the fashion."

"You don't think me less brave than other men?"

"My dear Georgie, I am perfectly convinced that there is no danger in this world that could put you out for a moment. But what are you talking about?"

"I am talking about *this*. The moment that spear tumbled me over I felt a thrill of delight go through me. Just before I fainted my last feeling was delight, and the first moment I came to my senses again my feeling was delight. Do you know why?"

"Well, I must say I don't. One may be content to get a wound for one's flag, but I don't quite understand positive delight in getting it. No; I give it up, Georgie."

"You do? You can't even guess?" He looked disappointed. "Can't you understand that I was glad because I thought, if I did not die, I should probably be sent home?"

She did look surprised indeed now. "Sent home? Because you were to be sent home? But were you really so home-sick as all that? To want to get home—and a

campaign going on; and one's comrades in the thick of it! My dear Georgie, I don't believe a word of it."

"That is why I asked if you thought me a coward," he said gravely. "What I am saying is true; I was longing to get home."

"Well, it wasn't out of cowardice, that's certain. There are not any cowards like that; and even if there were *you* couldn't be one. It was something else. Do tell me. Though I wish you hadn't begun to tell me anything, for I don't like mysteries. And I always guess wrong when I have to guess at all."

"I was longing to get back to England, Camiola, because I was longing to get back to *you*; because I love you."

He took her hand in his. She was too much astonished to withdraw it at once. He looked into her wondering eyes; the moon shone upon his thin, delicate, boyish face, and on the wasted cheeks, which now even in the pale moonlight showed themselves suffused with a girl-like flush of conflicting emotions.

Camiola did not at first realize the full meaning of what was passing, and of which she was a part. She was for a moment almost inclined to laugh. But she began to understand the story told by those eager eyes and that delicate flushed face and the trembling of the hot hand that held her own. Then she felt as if she could not keep from bursting into tears. It was all so utterly unexpected. It was all so bewildering, so distracting, so terrible.

"Oh, Georgie, my dear Georgie," she murmured, drawing away her hand, "I never thought of this."

"I know you never did; I never tried to make you think of it before. I didn't know it myself until I found myself away from you —out in Egypt. Then it came on me. But when I got back I held my tongue, Camiola: and do you know why? Let me take your hand again—you won't? You are angry with me?"

"No, no," she said, in a low sad voice. "Why should I be angry? But this is a great misfortune, Georgie, for you and for me."

"Why should it be a misfortune?" He spoke now in more assured and eager tones, no longer tremulous, all having been told. "Why should it be a misfortune? All my people love you; my mother adores you. You don't love me as I love you, I know that. But you do like me, I know *that;* and the right sort of love will come in time. You don't dislike me?" for something in the look of her face made him stop with this sudden question.

"Dislike you, Georgie, my dear friend, my brother and more than brother? Why, what a question! I am very fond of you, you know that very well."

"Then, why should this be a misfortune? I shall be quite satisfied with the kind of love you can give me for the present. I can wait until the other love comes; I can be happy with you even if it never comes."

"I wish you had told me all this before," she said, with something like impatience in her voice. "What is the good of making mysteries about things?"

"I would have told you at once, only I

was afraid if I asked you to marry me people might think it was because of your fortune."

"My fortune! There again; my fortune! I wish my fortune was at the bottom of the sea, or—or—yes, that the devil had it!" Camiola exclaimed, losing all sense of the seemliness of words in her excitement. "There, I oughtn't to have said that, and I wish I hadn't said it; but I feel it all the same, and you drive me to it, Georgie! What did it matter what people said? Who would have believed it? Do you think I should have believed it? Do you think your mother would have believed it, or Janette, or dear, kind, generous Mr. Lisle? I think you had no right to keep this thing to yourself all this long time. If you were really in love with me, why didn't you say so, and not let things go on in this absurd sort of way?"

One might have thought, from her words and her tones, that she was enraged at having somehow lost the chance of marrying him. But Georgie Lisle did not now interpret her meaning thus.

"Surely, Camiola," he pleaded, in a voice not much like that of a hopeful lover, "it cannot be too late? Nothing has happened to make any change."

"You don't know; how could you? It *is* too late; it is ever so much too late."

"But, Camiola—Camiola; my love——"

"Oh, don't talk in that way; you must not. It *is* too late. If you had told me this sooner; if you had written to me from Egypt."

"Would you have married me?" he asked, in very doubtful tones.

"I would; yes, I would. I was always very fond of you—as fond as if you were my brother; and I would have married you to please you, and to please Lady Letitia, and to please Janette, if it would have pleased them. Do you think I could have refused you if you wished it, and Lady Letitia? Do you think I could have sent you away disappointed, and offended her? Oh no."

"Then why must you refuse me now?"

"Can't you guess?" She turned her eyes away from his. She looked sadly along the

path of light which the moon made on the quiet river.

"You love some one else?"

"Yes, Georgie."

"Some one you didn't know when I went away?"

"Yes, Georgie."

"Oh, but it can't be; there is nobody." He never thought of Albert Romont. He had been jealous of Romont's popularity with the whole family, Camiola included, but it had not occurred to his harmless egotism to suspect anything else.

"Camiola, you are not serious; you are only making an excuse. There is something else."

"There is nothing else, Georgie, nothing in the world; and what I say is true—only too true. I wish it were not; I wish from my heart that I were free to marry you, if it were only to please Lady Letitia. But you spoke too late, my dear boy; you spoke too late." She turned her face to him now with a tender and a pitying expression, and he saw that tears of genuine emotion were sparkling in her eyes.

"Have I been long too late?" He looked away; he did not wish to embarrass her by letting her know that he had seen her tears. But she would not have heeded.

"About forty-eight hours," she said, with a strange smile, and she shook her head as if in vain protest over the unfair dealings of the destinies. "About forty-eight hours, Georgie, more or less. I think if, when you were telegraphing your arrival at Southampton, you had telegraphed an offer of marriage to me, I should have met you when you came with a yes and a kiss."

"But this is impossible; this is absurd, Camiola. You can't have fallen so much in love in that short time."

"Can't I, Georgie? Oh, but I can, though; and, what is more and worse, my dear boy, I *have*." She was making a desperate effort to keep up her courage and be lively.

"But there is nobody!" he exclaimed angrily. "Who is it, Camiola?" he demanded, rather inconsistently with the spirit of his positive assertion.

"That, Georgie, is a question you mustn't

ask; at all events, I don't mean to answer it. I haven't been unkind to you, dear Georgie; dear brother, you will not be unkind to your sister?"

"Still, if we are brother and sister, I ought to know," he urged despairingly.

"No, my dear, you ought not to know; it is a woman's secret altogether; it is my secret. I wouldn't tell even Lady Letitia a word about it; and you won't let her know anything, Georgie—I know you won't, for my sake? I am going to be a very unhappy girl, I know, and I am making you unhappy; but it isn't my fault; and oh, please forgive me, and don't let Lady Letitia know."

"Does—does—*he* know?" Georgie got out the word with a great effort and after more than one spasm.

She drew away at first as if the question were hurtful to her; but her manner instantly changed into its familiar kindliness and frankness. "He does not know," she said; "and he never shall know, so far as I can help it. It would be impossible that he

could have the faintest idea; and I am ashamed of myself—and there, don't ask me any more, or encourage me into telling you any more. I don't believe any other girl in the world would have told even her brother as much as I have told you to-night, if she were in my place. Now, Georgie, let us go in; and let us not say any more about this wretched business, ever again. You don't want me to marry you now, Georgie, any more, do you?" She looked to him with a wan smile on her sad face.

"No!" the young man exclaimed, with a burst of hysterical passion; "I don't—oh yes, I do—I do!"

Then he sent forth a cry like that of a woman, and he threw his arms wildly up and staggered and fell crash on the gravel walk. In his excitement he had caused his wound to reopen, and the blood was crimsoning the front of his shirt. Camiola did not call out or utter a word. She got down on her knees beside him, and was setting herself to get the neck of his shirt open and to give him air. She thought he had merely fainted,

and she had always heard that one must not try to raise a person who has fainted, but keep the fallen one in a recumbent position, and secure freedom of breathing and plenty of air. But she soon found her hands covered with some horrible dew, and she could see in the clear moonlight that it was blood. She knew what had happened, she knew his wound had broken out into bleeding again; but she did not know what might happen—she did not know that he might not die in her arms. Yet she would not cry out; and even in that moment of dread and agony her first thought was for his mother, for dear Lady Letitia, for the wild alarm it might bring upon her. "Oh, if only somebody, anybody, would come! Did no one, no one but he and she, think of coming into the open air on such a night as that? Was no one coming her way? If he were to die!" At the thought she bent over him and kissed his pale lips again and again, and called him by fond names, such as a sister lavishes on a parting brother. And while she was kissing him she heard footsteps on

the gravel walk, and she saw a man and a woman near.

"Oh, come here!" she called, in a low, clear voice, meant only to be heard by those who were near, and not to alarm a whole crowded company.

Mrs. Pollen and Mr. Romont approached. Romont, without staying to ask a question, or indeed to speak a word, got down on his knees beside Camiola.

CHAPTER IX.

BREAKING UP.

CAMIOLA had not noticed at first who it was that came to her assistance. She recognized Mrs. Pollen before she looked at Romont. When she did see him she started and exclaimed, "Mr. Romont!" in a tone of surprise and something like alarm. This was not lost on Mrs. Pollen. Romont and she had come suddenly on Camiola and Georgie; had turned round the corner of a path of cedars, and had found their way stopped by Camiola and her fallen lover. They had both seen Camiola kiss poor Georgie's pallid face. Neither stopped to think anything about that at the moment; the pair might have been husband and wife, or brother and sister; but when Romont, dropping on his

knees, saw that he was beside Camiola Sabine, and that she had been kissing young Lisle, the wounded hero come back from the wars, he naturally drew the only conclusion that seemed at the time fairly open to rational man's acceptance. Such conclusion, too, Mrs. Pollen might have drawn if she had not seen and appreciated the look of pain and shame which came over Camiola's face, like a wet wan cloud over the moon, when she saw that Romont was near her. "If I know anything of women, I know what that means," Mrs. Pollen said to herself. "There will be some pretty playing at cross purposes going on here presently, if some one doesn't intervene in time." It did not take her long to make up her mind any more than to come to her conclusions, and she made up her mind that if no one else intervened in time she would.

"We were walking here, and he fainted," Camiola stammered; "and he had been wounded, you know——"

"Yes, I see," Romont quietly answered; "his wound has taken to bleeding again.

He mayn't be any the worse for that, perhaps. We may lift him now, I think. He is recovering himself; the faint is nearly over. Mrs. Pollen, suppose you kindly come and take his head in your lap?"

"Certainly," Mrs. Pollen answered, with promptness and perfect composure. She sat quietly down on the gravel walk, and raised the boy's head tenderly and took it in her lap. "Why, it's Georgie Lisle," she whispered. Camiola now was standing up. Romont was still bending over the wounded youth, and was holding a handkerchief tightly squeezed against that part of the lad's shoulder from which the blood was oozing; the rush of blood had ceased.

Georgie opened his eyes languidly; closed them again; opened them anew less languidly, and murmured, "Camiola?"

"Here, Georgie, near you," Camiola said. "You are better, are you not? Your wound began to bleed a little——"

"I'm all right," he murmured. "It's nothing. I don't care about the wound; it isn't *that*."

"No," thought Mrs. Pollen, "it isn't *that*."

He became aware of the fact that Camiola and he were not any longer alone, and he made an attempt to rise, but Mrs. Pollen kept him down with gentle force. "Where on earth am I?" he asked, with a curiosity just arousing itself from that languor after a faint which takes everything for granted, and is puzzled by nothing.

"You are lying in the lap of a woman old enough to be your mother," Mrs. Pollen informed him; "and two minutes' walk from a room where you will be able to go in a very few seconds. Mr. Romont says there is no harm done, and he understands things; and I think he is right, and I have seen a few wounded men myself in my time."

"Give me your hand, old man," Romont said, as he saw George trying to rise. "All right, Miss Sabine"—Camiola was making an instinctive movement to come to the rescue also—"I'll take care of him. We'll get him quietly into a bed, and then I'll have a surgeon come and see him at once. There's sure to be a surgeon of some kind

in all that crowd yonder. Nobody ever saw a crowd like that without a doctor of some sort in it."

"I can walk all right," Georgie said, staggering as he said the words; "I'm sure I can."

"Still, you may as well lean on my arm," Romont said.

"And on mine," added Mrs. Pollen; and she offered him an arm which was as strong as it was white and shapely. Camiola felt as if she were left out in the cold. She was now beginning to wonder what they could have thought of her. They must have seen her kiss poor Georgie. What did that matter? Was he not almost her brother? Was he not to all appearance dying at the time? Still, they were, perhaps, not exactly in possession of all the facts of the case; they certainly were not in possession of some of the facts; and what would they think of her? what would *he* think of her?

"I'm awfully jolly now." Georgie tried to speak in cheery man-of-the-world tone. "I say, how awfully kind you both are!"

"It's in Mr. Romont's line," Mrs. Pollen said. "His business in life is to go about helping people—it's his trade; and for me, I'm always delighted to have a chance of doing anything for a good-looking young man."

"Look here," Romont suggested, "can't we sneak into the house in some quiet way, down the chimney or somehow, so that we mayn't be seen, and this boy's mother get frightened? You know your way about, Mrs. Pollen; it's your own homestead."

"Yes; but my foot isn't on my native heath, and I have only just got hold of the place; and—— Oh, here's Mr. Pilgrim; he knows all about it."

Mr. Pilgrim had come mooning out of the house, at odds with all the festivity and tired of the crowd. He was put in possession of the facts, and he undertook to conduct George utterly unseen into a remote and quiet room, where he could lie on a bed until a surgeon came, and he promised to find a surgeon in a moment.

"Oh, thank you!" exclaimed Camiola, with

sparkling eyes—"thank you so much, dear, dear Mr. Pilgrim! What a treasure you are! you always are."

Pilgrim's bloodless cheek did not indeed redden, but a positive spasm came over his face, and his lips trembled. "The very thing I might have expected!" Mrs. Pollen said to her own soul; "just as I thought first. We must really get this young lady to moderate the transports of her gratitude."

Georgie was conveyed away by Romont and Pilgrim. Mrs. Pollen and Camiola remained standing on the steps of one of the side doors of the house. They were in shadow; there were but few lights in the windows on that side. The sounds of the music and the various movements came on Camiola's ear clearly enough to bring sense of companionship and shelter and protection with them, but not loudly enough to suggest interruption. She felt that she must say something to Mrs. Pollen; it would be impossible not to offer some explanation, to let matters stand just as they did. Camiola did not as yet much like Mrs. Pollen;

thought her fibre rather coarse; did not understand her; had not even tried to understand her. Also she had somehow got the idea into her mind that Mrs. Pollen did not much like her. It was not pleasant, therefore, to have to humble herself to explanations and to endeavour to propitiate Mrs. Pollen, but it had to be done.

"I am afraid you will be inclined to form wrong conclusions," she began, "about me, and about Georgie Lisle. You saw me kiss him?"

"Yes, I saw you kiss him," Mrs. Pollen said; "more than once, too. What matter, Miss Sabine? I shan't tell. I think to kiss and tell is not a bit worse than to see a kiss and tell."

"But it isn't that," Camiola answered somewhat hotly; "I don't care about being seen; I don't care if all the people saw me kiss him. I have known him a long time, and I am very fond of him, and he fainted, and I thought he was going to die, and why shouldn't I kiss him?"

"I am sure, my dear young lady, I know

no reason why you shouldn't. I dare say I should have kissed him myself out of pure sympathy under the same conditions, although I have not known him a long time, and am not particularly fond of him."

"But it isn't that," Camiola interrupted.

"Oh, it isn't that. Then, what is it?"

"Well, perhaps you will think that Georgie Lisle and I are engaged; that we are lovers."

"I don't think anything of the kind," said Mrs. Pollen, quietly.

"I am very glad."

"I don't think you are engaged, and I don't believe you are lovers; at least, I don't believe that you are in love with him. If it comes to that, I know you are not." She fixed her eyes on Camiola's face. Camiola felt herself growing tremulous under the bold, deep eyes.

"My dear Miss Sabine," Mrs. Pollen said, "I don't want to know any of your secrets—at least, I didn't; but I can't help knowing your one particular secret now, and I do know it, and you know now that I know it."

"Oh, for pity's sake; oh, for Heaven's

sake!" Camiola implored, and she put her hands instinctively over her eyes. For Mrs. Pollen was right; Camiola felt too truly that Mrs. Pollen knew already that secret which twenty-four hours ago, two hours ago, she did not quite know herself. Georgie's own love-tale had set her heart in strange commotion. The sudden pang of shame which made her cry out Romont's name when she saw him kneeling beside her, and knew that he had seen her kiss Georgie Lisle, had first made her certain that she was in love, and with Romont.

"It don't matter my knowing it," Mrs. Pollen said. "Nobody will be any the wiser of it for me. I wouldn't have breathed a word of this to you, but that I do think it is right, and the part of one who wishes you well, to put you a little on your guard."

"On my guard against what?" Camiola asked, with returning defiance, and meeting Mrs. Pollen's look now boldly enough.

"Against yourself, my dear, and for the sake of others. I know that you are no flirt or commonplace beauty of any kind; I don't

believe you are even very vain—for a handsome girl with a fortune, that is to say—— "

"Oh, that everlasting fortune!" Camiola murmured between her teeth. "Must I always hear of it?"

"It *is* a nuisance to be rich—at least, I often find it so; but I don't know that I ever heard of anybody else who complained of it except you. But I speak out to you for your own good and the good of other people, and I wouldn't speak in such a way if I didn't believe you to be a woman with some heart and some brains. Make up your mind about this young Lisle."

"My mind is made up; I told him so."

"Yes; I thought as much. Well, then, keep to your resolve; you won't find it easy, but keep to it. You will have some trouble, that I see; but you must bear it, and keep to your resolve. Don't—for all the friends and relatives in the world—consent to marry that young man, or any man whom you don't love. For the man you do love, why, let things go as they will; he doesn't suspect—as yet—what I know. About other men—

do, like a good girl, let them alone. Keep clear of them, whatever their class. They are men, not stocks or stones. You are full of kindness, I know, but a handsome woman's kindness may sometimes kill a man. There, that's enough. Don't be angry with me for talking to you like a mother. I wish to Heaven I were your mother.—Well, Mr. Pilgrim, is our young patient all right? Thanks; I'm so glad to hear it.—Come, Miss Sabine, we had better go in. Fine as the night is, we have lungs and throats, you know."

She swept Camiola away with her, and they were presently immersed in the madding crowd. Camiola was for a while absolutely silent. The whole conditions of her life seemed to have been changed in a moment. She was as one suddenly taken into charge by some being from another world, and not as yet quite certain whether it is Goethe's Mephistopheles or Massinger's Angelo; a spirit of darkness or a spirit of light.

As Christian Pilgrim stood in the shadow

he was joined by Romont, who had just left Georgie.

"He's all right," Romont said; "he is not going to die this time. He'll be able to walk home presently, and nobody will know that anything happened to him."

"It's a pretty bad wound," Pilgrim said, shaking his head.

"I wish to Heaven I had the wound," Romont said, "and the balsam." He was thinking of the kisses he had seen laid on the lips of prostrate Georgie Lisle. "And I suppose the fellow doesn't even know he got them," he thought in his own mind. "They would have wakened me out of the sleep of death, I verily believe."

"What do you mean, Mr. Romont?" Pilgrim asked timidly; "what balsam?" He understood a meaning in Romont's words but not their meaning, and Romont's expression puzzled him.

"Nothing in particular; at least, never mind, old man. The world has some lucky fellows, Pilgrim."

"I am sure you are one of the very luckiest,

Mr. Romont; the happiest, at least. The world is very kind to you, and you are very kind to the world."

"Well, I haven't much to complain of, and that's a fact," said Romont, cheerily. "You look rather out of sorts, Pilgrim. But then, you always look out of sorts; it's a way you have. Do you know that I have a kind of idea you were scared by the sight of that poor lad's blood? I am used to that. I have carried the Geneva cross."

"I think you have done everything, Mr. Romont," his admirer said. They were a curious contrast: the one all youth and health and animation, a living illustration of the fusion of fire and clay; the other wasted, prematurely old, depressed, hopeless.

"There's one thing I mean not to do just now, if I can help it, Pilgrim, my Christian hero."

"And that is, Mr. Romont?"

"I mean not to make a fool of myself," Romont answered; and Pilgrim could not get him to say any more on the subject.

The gardens, which had been so lonely

when the festivity was at its height, were now crowded, for the party was now breaking up, and the guests were going away. The band was playing "God save the Queen," and this was understood to be the signal of parting. A cloud of men, women, and children was breaking over the garden. The cloud soon melted into living streams along the broad gravel walks under the cedars. There was much talking, but it was subdued in tone. The familiarity which had been just beginning to grow up in the minds of the humbler guests during their hours within doors suddenly deserted them again, as they came into the open air and the shadow of the stately old trees and the vicinity of the Rector's carriage and his departing family. Georgie Lisle was able to go home with his people, and none of them knew anything of what had happened to him. Walter Fitzurse kept with them to the last. He had handed Janette to the carriage, and on the way thither was trying to summon up courage enough to ask her for a flower from her fading bouquet; but he had not found the

courage while the opportunity remained, and he had to abandon the idea.

Mr. Lisle and Georgie were walking home, the distance being but short. Walter was turning away, somewhat depressed in mood, having failed to ask for the flower, when he came face to face with Romont.

"You're not going to bed yet, I dare say. I'm not; that's flat. Come along with me to the club; or stay, we'll go to my rooms; we'll be quieter there. I have got a little brougham here which will rattle us over in no time. It isn't mine, but my mother's, only I make use of it a good deal for her now and then, as indeed I do of most things that are hers and that I can make any use of."

He put his hand on Walter's arm, and was leading him away.

It was clear that Romont did not suppose Walter to be a resident of that quarter, and Walter could not summon up courage enough to tell him the truth. Walter was not at all inclined to say that he would be expected to escort one of the poor little girls of Fitzurse-

ham to her home. Nor, on the other hand, did it seem probable to Walter that his new friend would often be in that region again, and he was determined, come what would, to transfer himself to another and a different quarter at once. So they made their way through a little crowd at the gate. Walter thought he saw a glimpse of Miss Lammas as they went by, and it only made him quicken his steps. There were not many carriages; the lights of the brougham soon flashed upon them, and they got in and rolled away.

"I am glad it's over," said Romont, "and yet—I don't know; I think I enjoyed myself more than I expected."

He was determined to make the best of things.

"So did I," Walter replied, and tried to make his answer seem careless. Truly, he had enjoyed himself more than he expected, and in a different way.

Mrs. Pollen had announced her intention of remaining behind until the company had all gone. She wished to see what the place

would look like when deserted, she said; she remained standing by the ancient hearth in the great hall, which had been deadly lively with its ill-assorted company a short time before. In the very last flickering-out group of guests she noticed the odd figure of Jethro Merridew, the morning callman. Mrs. Pollen knew him already, and had heard of his story.

"Mr. Merridew," she said, as he was slowly passing, "I want to say a word to you before you go;" and she beckoned him with her fan.

He approached her deferentially and bowing with antique courtesy, renewing his bows as he came nearer and nearer.

"Mr. Merridew, you and I are both waiting and looking for some one. I have come to Fitzurseham to look for a relation whom I may never find; and you are waiting for your daughter. May I ask if she has yet come?"

Merridew at first looked sharply and almost angrily at her when she spoke of his daughter. The subject was one which he

was accustomed to hear of only in connection with gibes and rudeness and laughter. The feelings of the Fitzurseham public were not always very refined, and certain misfortunes were usually considered by them as legitimate theme for mirth. Any supposed derangement of a man's faculties, for example, was regarded as a very fitting subject for comic observation and for pleasant raillery. If a man's wife were supposed to be rather free-and-easy in her conduct, it was esteemed quite the right sort of thing to chaff the husband about it; to "rally him," as the humorists of a past day would have said, and to take good care he should not forget it. In the same spirit Mr. Merridew's supposed craze on the one theme of his daughter and her expected grandeur was understood to give all his neighbours a proper occasion for making fun of him. It may be that just for an instant Mr. Merridew supposed Mrs. Pollen was indulging in the popular pastime; but the expression on her face soon satisfied and quieted him.

"No, I have not yet heard from her," the

poor little man said. "I came here, ma'am, with the thought that perhaps this was the place and this was the occasion when she might believe it fitting to make her reappearance; but no, no. 'She comes not yet to glad her father's eyes,' as the poet says."

"You have never told me all about her, Mr. Merridew; and I should much like to know. I should also like to tell you about my search for a relation, of whose very existence I am not certain. You have lived some time in this place, and you must know everybody; you might help me in my search, perhaps, and I might help you."

"I don't talk about it much," he said hurriedly—"here, in Fitzurseham, because people don't understand, and are rude and vulgar, and don't believe, and laugh at their betters. The loud laugh, ma'am, speaks the vacant mind."

"I quite understand your caution; and I too am very slow about letting people in general know anything of my object in coming to this place. They wouldn't understand me; they would think me absurd.

But you, Mr. Merridew, are not people in general, and I should not mind telling you."

Mr. Merridew was entirely overcome.

"I should be proud to tell my story to a lady like you, a real lady with a heart for sympathy—the lady of the land, indeed, if I may presume to apply to you the words of the great poet, Coleridge."

"Shall we talk of it now, Mr. Merridew? I am not fond of going to bed early; I don't know if you are."

"This night, ma'am, it is my intention to outwatch the Bear, as Milton says. I do not propose to sleep at all, for I have to arouse half Fitzurseham at all manner of early hours—after your gracious hospitality of this evening."

"Sit here, then, Mr. Merridew, and tell me all about it." For Mrs. Pollen had been by no means convinced that Merridew's notions came of mere monomania, and she was inclined to regard him with compassion, and was curious to know whether something could not be done for him.

CHAPTER X.

TILL THE DAWN.

FITZURSE felt himself floating in a very heaven of delight as the brougham rattled through the streets of the West End. The town was all alive. As they drove down Piccadilly there were strings of carriages waiting outside houses which had awnings spread over their doorways and carpets stretched beneath them. Little armies of footmen were in rapid manœuvre. Ladies in evening dress and sparkling with diamonds were coming in and going out. The brougham had to drive slowly, to Walter's great delight. But he took care not to show any delight. He leaned back, and put on as well as he could an air of incurious familiarity. But when his mind sometimes returned to the

dull and dirty and decaying rows of houses with which he was familiar, to the darkness and squalor and meanness of the life which he had so lately left behind, he felt that the bottom of the Thames would be to him more welcome than a longer residence at Fitzurseham.

The brougham turned into St. James's Street. The windows of all the clubs were blazing with light. Men were walking along in evening dress, some with their light outer coats thrown carelessly over their arms. Fitzurse noticed with a sort of wonder that no one seemed to look after them, or take their appearance in the street in such attire as anything out of the common. If one were to parade the main street at Fitzurseham in evening dress the whole population would be after him. How many dress coats, he wondered, were there in the whole place?

Two or three doors out of St. James's Street the brougham stopped at a small old-fashioned house. "This is my den," Romont said, and, opening the door with a latch-key, he cordially invited Fitzurse to come in.

Fitzurse assumed, when he saw the latch-key used, that he would be shown into a house with one little jet of light burning for the illumination of the late comer, all the rest of the inmates being in bed. He found, however, that a respectable elderly gentleman in black came out at once to receive them. For a moment he forgot what he had already learned of his new friend's family, and he fancied this was Romont's father, who had sat up probably to censure him for not coming home earlier. He had even a faint idea that he might himself come in for some of the blame. Seeing, however, that the respectable parent only came forward to take the coats of the late comers, Fitzurse found the truth borne in upon him that the elderly personage was his friend's servant. It was then clear that he was launched at once into a world of which he had up to that time only read or dreamed—a world in which young unmarried men kept valets, and thought nothing of it.

To do him justice, he quickly pulled himself together, and was equal to the new and strange conditions in which he found himself.

The conditions were not much less strange than those which surrounded the first waking moments of Abon Hassan in the "Arabian Nights," when he finds himself turned into the Commander of the Faithful.

Soda-water, brandy, whisky, cigars, cigarettes, were produced, and Romont told his servant he might go to bed. The two young men began naturally to talk about the evening they had spent and the people they had met. Walter was longing to get into some conversation about Miss Lisle, and yet was shy of approaching the subject too quickly and directly. He spoke first of Camiola, and launched forth in great praise of her beauty. Romont did not seem inclined to say much about her, and answered in a constrained sort of way, until Walter asked him in a tone of something like surprise whether he did not think her handsome.

"Oh yes, I admired her; very much, in fact—one can't help it; but I rather kept out of her way. I am shy of these women with lots of money, new rich people especially. This girl, I am told, has a big fortune,

and the Lisles are bringing her out; and I dare say her head is pretty well turned already, and she fancies every man who goes near her wants to marry her. I am not rich enough to put myself in the way of that sort of thing. I haven't anything but what a very dear old mother is good enough to give me, and I must keep clear of girls like Miss Sabine. But she's a very fine girl all the same; and any one who wants a handsome wife with plenty of money would do well to try his luck there. I don't; at least, I shouldn't like to marry a woman who would always think that she had made me rich, and that she ought to run the concern."

"Miss Lisle is a charming girl, I think," Walter said in a tentative way.

"A nice face; yes, and rather a clever sort of girl, I fancy. But she has too many views of life for my taste. I hadn't much talk with her. There were some pretty girls, I thought, among the crowd, if I may put it that way—little milliners, and that sort of thing. I got alongside of a girl I used to see when I was acting my part of Alsatian up yonder. I

used to see her going and coming, but I never ventured to speak to her. A working man mustn't presume to speak to a milliner—go to! What would the world be coming to? There must be classes, we trust. But I had some talk with her to-night."

"Do you know her name?" Fitzurse asked, with a misgiving and an uncomfortable anticipation.

"Oh yes, I knew her name before. She's a girl named Lammas—Vinnie Lammas, a very nice clever little girl; and, look here, just as modest and well-behaved a girl as you ever saw. I called her a milliner, but I don't think she is that. Her mother is, I believe. She told me she was going in for being a private secretary to some great lady or other. I wish my mother wanted a private secretary, and I would recommend Miss Lammas.

Romont spoke quite seriously, and without any of the affectation of the gallant gay Lothario which is still common to young men of the upper class when they talk of pretty girls of the lower. But his words made Fitzurse wince. This was his own particular

sweetheart, this little Vinnie Lammas about whom his companion was talking so easily and cheerily. Not for all the world would he now have the fact known. He felt at that moment as if a gulf had opened between him and Vinnie, and all the time he was distinctly conscious of jealous pangs, as he thought of Vinnie being talked to thus confidentially by this handsome young swell.

"I tell you what," the latter went on, "I don't know of anything more awful than for a pretty and clever girl like that to be forced to live in that beastly place pent up with all these poor miserable people. She never has any amusement of any kind, and I fancy she is very poor—in fact, she told me as much; and she has a good deal of ambition in a sort of way. Do you know what she told me? That she would give a year of her life to go once to a West End party, and be properly rigged out for the occasion. She didn't say rigged out; that's my phrase. But think of that—a bright, pretty girl like that languishing to go to one of these horrible crushes that a man is only longing to run

away from the moment he gets into them! By Jove! I should like to get my mother to take her to a West End party, just to let the dear little thing have her night of amusement and gratify her harmless little longing. Mother would do it if she were in town; she'd do it in a moment if I asked her, and never think any harm."

"Oh, it would never do," Fitzurse said hastily.

"No, I don't suppose it would. Besides, Vinnie is engaged—she told me, or as good as told me—to some young fellow over there, and of course if he is a fellow of any spirit he wouldn't let her be taken about in that sort of way to a place where he wasn't going."

"No, of course not," murmured unfortunate Fitzurse. "Are you to see her again?"

"To see Vinnie? Oh no; I don't suppose so. I can't do anything for her; and what would be the good? I'm not one bit mashed upon her, and I don't want her to be mashed upon me; and she wouldn't in any case. But she interests me, and she's a dear little Vinnie."

"A dear little Vinnie!" Thus was the girl spoken of, and spoken of, too, without the slightest intention of disrespect, who the very day before had been Fitzurse's ideal of womanhood. So utterly was she below his companion's social range that it seemed quite natural to him to speak of her as "dear little Vinnie;" as if she were a waitress or a lady's-maid. Walter almost hated the young man who thus spoke of her; he almost hated the girl. "Does he call her Vinnie to her face, I wonder?" he asked of his own angry soul. For a moment he thought of having an explanation and a scene with her, and he felt as if he should like to beat her; and then a rush of servile satisfaction came over him at the thought that this would give him all the better excuse for getting rid of her.

The talk passed away from "dear little Vinnie," and went on to many other subjects and persons, concerning most of which Fitzurse knew but little even by hearsay. He kept the strictest watch over his tongue, lest he should betray ignorance of something whereof he was expected to have knowledge,

and thereby let his companion know how utterly out of society he was. Once again he felt happy. Nothing on earth, he resolved, should induce him to live any longer at Fitzurseham.

"I suppose you have money of your own?" Romont said, in answer to some observation from Fitzurse about his having soon to look out for new quarters.

"Very little," Fitzurse said carelessly.

"Yes, yes; I think I heard something to that effect. The property all got muddled away, didn't it, long before your time?"

"All gone; pretty nearly," Fitzurse replied, with the air of one to whom money is of small concern.

"Better look out for some girl with a lot of money."

"But you have just been saying you wouldn't do anything of the kind yourself?"

"Ah, well, there's a difference. You see, you would bring a girl a grand old family name; to be Mrs. Fitzurse would be something even in these levelling days that Lady Letitia is so fond of denouncing. If I were

a girl with a big fortune I should be delighted to exchange it for such a name. That would be a fair bargain; but I have nothing to offer. It wouldn't be much to be a Mrs. Romont, would it?"

Fitzurse did not know very well what he ought to say under the circumstances, and so he allowed the matter to drop without making any remark. There was indeed a fearful joy about this playing at being a man of great family. He was in for it now, and he would not draw back. He had begun by envying his new friend; his bright varied life, his familiarity with good society, his easy circumstances, his charming bachelor quarters in one of the best parts of London. Now he was already beginning to feel an air of superiority growing on him. After all, a generous mother, a respectable family, a good place in society, and handsome lodgings off St. James's Street, although excellent in their way, do not exactly constitute a Fitzurse. Walter was getting into a mood to believe that it would not so much matter, after all, if wealth and commerce, laws and learning, were to die,

provided only that we were not bereft of our old nobility. He called his new friend "my dear fellow" several times, and with the most easy grace.

The dawn was reddening over silent Fitzurseham when Walter got to his home, his shabby little lodging there. Life had changed absolutely, utterly, for him. The past had suddenly become hateful to him. The joys, the hopes, the ambition of yesterday were despicable in his eyes now. Yet the place which was an odious prison to him yesterday was glorified into a paradise for the moment. The presence of Miss Lisle had changed it as it had changed him. He would do great and glorious things to gain her; he would gain her. He would win a name at which the world should wonder, and then she would not disdain him; she would love him. With heart-throbs of ineffable delight, he whispered to himself that she did not even now disdain him; that she had been very kind to him. He had not dared to ask her if he might call, and, indeed, he supposed it would not be proper to ask if

he might call on a young unmarried lady; but he had not even ventured to ask permission of Lady Letitia to call on her. What if he should never have a chance of seeing them—of seeing her again? Oh, but that would not be possible; they must meet again. His heart told him that they were destined to meet—it was destiny; it was fate. With that conviction he bore himself proudly. He was now convinced that he was the last living descendant of the great Fitzurse family. He had had secret doubts and misgivings on this subject before, but since he had spoken with Janette Lisle his mind was clear. Not merely was he satisfied that he did come of that proud race, but he was likewise satisfied that he had refrained from asserting his right and his social rank before out of sheer sympathy with the great movement for man's equality. He admired himself doubly: first as an undoubted Fitzurse, and next as a Fitzurse who personally despised the distinctions of rank, and would even have consented not to be known as a Fitzurse. He strode along the grey street

with a more lordly air than ever. He was longing to get to his bedroom, in order to have a quiet look at himself in his evening dress. Undoubtedly, he did look very well in his evening dress—a garb which does not always become those who wear it for the first time. He had glanced at himself many a time at Lady Letitia's, and had always received new encouragement from what he saw. "I must be a gentleman by birth," he thought proudly to himself, "or how would it come natural to me to wear these clothes and to look so well in them?" Now he was eager to have himself all to himself, to be alone and to have a good study of his face and figure before he took off the precious dress clothes. It was delightful to think that everybody was in bed, and that he could not be seen as he stole to his room.

In all this time he had thought but little about Vinnie. Once or twice it occurred to him that when next they met she might ask him some troublesome questions about the manner in which he had spent his evening. But now suddenly it was borne in upon him

that she stood right in the way of his ambition and his love at once. What was the use of forming schemes and plans to win Miss Lisle and wear her, when he was already pledged, engaged, bound hard and fast to this poor little girl in the shabby house in Fitzurseham?

Even the dawn of a summer morning could not make beautiful that end of Fitzurseham in which Fitzurse lived. It was the inland extreme, if we may thus describe it; away from the river, the churchyard, and the rectory. The street was new, comparatively speaking, and consisted of two long rows of stucco-fronted houses, with flights of steps and little patches of dusty enclosure, supposed to have been intended for gardens. Every one of these houses was exactly like the other. The eye turned instinctively away from their gaunt monotony of stucco. They were all exactly in the same condition of premature decay. They were all much too big for the people who lived in them; they were all let out in lodgings; they had all been built under the inspiration of some

maniacal idea that wealthy Londoners would come and live in them. Walter had a large bedroom and a sitting-room, and he almost shuddered as he entered his dreary possessions. The blinds in the drawing-room were carefully drawn down, and the dawn was only able to steal in. There was the regulation lodging-house mirror, with its gilt frame shrouded in gauze; there was the gilt and gaudy apron filling up the fireplace; there were the shells to ornament the chimney-piece; there were the wax flowers under a glass shade. He pulled up the blind and looked out of the window, but suddenly drew back as if the one glance had brought some disagreeable sensation with it; and then he relieved his mind by looking in the mirror and studying the effect of his dress clothes. The effect was consoling, and he went to bed to dream of the West End and of Janette Lisle.

Walter had not reached his lodging wholly unseen of watchful eyes. On the opposite side of the street a little way up lived Vinnie Lammas and her mother. It was the sight

of their house which had brought with it a disagreeable idea, and sent him from the window. Vinnie had waited for hours after her return from the festivities in the hope of seeing him, of merely seeing him ; and now she had seen him, and that was all. She had eluded the tender vigilance of her mother, and persuaded the poor old woman to go to bed in the full belief that Vinnie was going to bed also to have a sound sleep. But the girl did not go to bed; she sat and watched until the dawn came up, and at last she saw Walter return to his home. He had not come near her at the breaking-up of the party in Fitzurse House; she and her mother had hung about the grounds until they found that he was positively gone. Vinnie affected to think nothing of it; she even went so far as to assure her mother that she did not expect him to come to her; that he had explained in advance the reasons why he could not do so; that it was all right. She would not admit to her mother, she would not admit to herself, how much her heart misgave her. She went to bed a little

comforted by the knowledge that he was near; that she had seen him; that he would be sure to tell her all about it and make everything seem quite right when he came to see her to-morrow—to-day that is; the sun was already up.

Nor was poor Vinnie the only anxious watcher in Fitzurseham that morning. The same dawn found Camiola wide awake, and full of fear and trouble and pain of mind, and thrilling also with emotion that was wild and startling, not all trouble, and that was new to her. Poor Georgie Lisle was tossing feverishly on his bed, and was angry with the hateful day when it began to force its unwelcome companionship on him. The event of the past night had only flung new fuel on the love that consumed him. He kept saying to himself, "She must have me; she must have me. I will kill myself if she refuses; I will tell her so." Over near St. James's Street Romont was lighting another cigar, and was thinking it would hardly be worth while going to bed at all now: he would go and have a Turkish bath, he

thought, as soon as the Hammams opened, and then he would go out of town somewhere for the day. "To think of such a girl being in love with *him!*" was the burden of his thoughts, the "him" being Georgie Lisle. "I wish to Heaven I had never seen her," Romont said to himself. "I was all right until I saw her. What a fool I am! I think I'll run down and see dear old mother."

Mrs. Pollen, sitting alone in front of Fitzurse House, had perceived that the dawn was creeping up the sky. "Mr. Merridew and I were having a long talk, Mr. Pilgrim," she explained. "He has just gone. Will you kindly tell the coachman to get ready, please. I am shocked to find that I have kept you all out of bed so long."

"I am not sleepy, madame," said Pilgrim.

CHAPTER XI.

A PASSIONATE PILGRIM.

CAMIOLA had a terrible time of it that day. She could not sleep much, although she had not gone to bed until the dawn, for in her heart, as in Hamlet's, there was a kind of fighting that would not let her sleep. When she got up, hoping to find that every one else was still in bed, she became acquainted with the fact that Georgie Lisle was up also. She could not escape him; and he told her of his love all over again. He was more feverish and impassioned than ever. He seemed to have lost all power of self-restraint. He protested again and again that he could not live without her, and that if she would not love him he would kill himself. She tried to reason with him; tried to laugh him out of

his madness; tried to make him believe, to make herself believe, that he was not serious; that he did not mean what he said. "I am dying of love for you, Camiola," he passionately declared. She made vain appeals to his courage, to his manhood, to his spirit; she grew angry with him, and spoke hot contemptuous words to him.

"I wouldn't ask a girl to marry me who didn't love me," she said, "if I were a man; I would die first. I wouldn't have a girl who was willing to marry me on such terms. I am ashamed of you, Georgie; you ought to be ashamed of yourself. Do you want to drive me out of the house?"

"I don't care," was all he could say. "If you leave the house I'll go after you. I can't live without you, Camiola; and I will not live without you. If you don't have me I'll kill myself."

"I wish you would kill me," Camiola said. "Would that serve your purpose as well, Georgie? It would be better for me to be dead than to be the cause of all this trouble."

Then she burst into tears, and begged of

him to leave her; and for the moment he became alarmed at the tempest of grief he had brought up, and he left her. Camiola could think of nothing better than to go and see Mrs. Pollen. Mrs. Pollen seemed a kind woman; and she knew something about Camiola which others did not know. Lady Letitia was not up yet, nor Janette; and Camiola knew that Mrs. Pollen was an early riser. Camiola was a spoilt child in the Lisle household, and was allowed to go where she would and as she pleased. So she left the rectory and sped to Fitzurse House in a faint hope that Mrs. Pollen might have remained there all night. She found Mr. Pilgrim arranging and trimming flower-beds on the lawn. Pilgrim, it was now understood by everybody, was to be retained by Mrs. Pollen as perpetual caretaker of Fitzurse House, whether she should inhabit it or not. He was by temperament and habit a "handy man," and could do almost anything that wanted to be done. One of the reasons why he admired Romont so much was that Romont, too, was a "handy man."

An uneasy light came into Pilgrim's eyes when he saw Miss Sabine. He seemed at once delighted and alarmed. Mrs. Pollen, he told her, had not remained in Fitzurse House; she had gone to her hotel in Dover Street. But she would be certain to be in Fitzurse House some time that day.

Then Camiola ought to have gone back at once to the rectory. But she did not. She had always been in the habit of talking in free and friendly fashion to Pilgrim; and she was glad to be away from the rectory just now; at least until Lady Letitia and Janette were up. It was a relief to her to listen to Pilgrim's slow, quiet, melancholy sentences after Georgie Lisle's wild and sickening ravings. So they walked about the grounds together, and she asked him questions concerning the place and its history, and she set him talking about Romont. That was a dangerous subject for her; dangerous especially because Pilgrim was so much of a hero-worshipper that he made of Bertie Romont a positive embodiment of all that is brave, generous, thoughtful, and unselfish in

man. It was delightful and it was torturing to Camiola to hear such words spoken, and it made her feel very tender and kind to poor Pilgrim. She turned her eyes on him with gratefulness and sincere regard, and their rays penetrated to his very heart of heart. Something he said about Romont drew from her a little outburst of feeling which alarmed her ; it might almost have betrayed her, she thought, to any one with quicker perceptions than poor, quiet Mr. Pilgrim.

" Let us go down to the river," she suddenly said, determined to turn off the conversation.

There was an ancient water-gate which opened on the strand. A flight of crumbling, oozy steps of stone led down. Camiola and Pilgrim went down the steps and stood upon the edge of the water. The sun was sparkling on the river; it was a morning to fill the heart with poetic tenderness and pathetic feeling. Camiola's nerves had been all unstrung. She found, she could not tell why, the tears come into her eyes.

" Let us go back," she said.

They turned, and as they turned she saw Pilgrim's pale, grey, and wasted face looking paler and greyer and more wasted than ever in the unsparing brightness of the sunlight. The morning seemed so youthful, and his face seemed so old! A great rush of pity came up in her heart. He looked so lonely, so wasted, and so worn; he had no son or daughter to care for him; now as she looked on him, full of those thoughts, he even appeared to her to be feeble. She longed to do something for him; to help him in some way. The lowest step of the flight was high, was broken, was slippery, and not quite easy to mount. Camiola leaped up lightly, and then, turning round with the impulse of one who is conscious of the full possession of youth and strength, she held out a kindly hand to help her elderly companion up. If she had struck him with that hand she could not have brought a look of more sudden and furious anger into his face. He flung back the hand she offered to him and gave a cry as of pain.

"What did you do that for?" he exclaimed,

with a flash of strange pale light in his eyes.

"Do what, Mr. Pilgrim? What do you mean? Why are you angry? I thought you might stumble; that step is so slippery, and I wanted to give you a helping hand."

"Come down," said he. As her hand was still outstretched he caught it and drew her towards the strand again. She leaped down. She felt that otherwise she would have been pulled down. "Do you think I am an old man?" he cried. "Do you think I am crippled with age? Do you think I am palsied or a dotard? Look here!"

He suddenly caught the girl up in his arms as if she were an infant, and ran with her up the steps; leaped from step to step, taking sometimes two steps at a time. When he had reached the gate he opened it with one hand, holding her firmly to his breast with the other. He strode among the paths and the flower-beds and across the lawn until he reached the entrance to the house, and there at last he put the girl on her feet. He did this with ease and care at once. She touched

ground so lightly that she hardly felt it. All the time he was carrying her she had not made the slightest resistance; she had not screamed or remonstrated, or indeed uttered a word. She held her breath and kept her presence of mind. Of what avail a scream, a struggle? The place was lonely; not a creature was to be seen. If he had gone mad—and at first she felt sure he had gone mad—there was no help for her but such as her own courage and her own wits could find.

Now she was on her feet again, and she looked into his eyes. They were wild indeed, but she saw no madness there.

"Mr. Pilgrim," she asked, "why on earth did you do that?"

"To show you that I am not an old man, a broken-down old man, as you seemed to think. That's why I took you in my arms as if you were a child and carried you. I could run a mile with you and not draw a long breath."

"But I never said you couldn't; and I am not a weight to be used in champion races or

athletic sports of any kind. I don't understand you."

"Are you offended with me?" He spoke despairingly rather than defiantly.

"Much more astonished than offended. It's not a thing to be merely offended at; and I am not given to taking offence; I am sorry you did it, that's all. Now I must go home."

She still did not dare to be too abrupt with him. She did not even yet feel by any means confident in his sanity, but she did not want any one to come that way and see them; she would rather take her chance. The rustle of some leaves on the ground sent a thrill of alarm through her. What if it should be the sound of Romont's footsteps?

"Can't you guess why I wanted you not to think me an old man?" Pilgrim asked.

"No; I can't guess; except that I suppose no one likes to be thought old; but I didn't think you old—not in that sense."

"You did; you did. You offered to help me!"

"What harm was that? You seemed to me to have stumbled, and you are not as

young as I am. I would have given a hand to any one at such a time."

"No; you wouldn't. You wouldn't have thought it necessary to offer a helping hand to—to—oh, to any young man—you know that; you wanted to help me because you looked on me as an old man; and it was kind of you; and sweet of you; everything you do is kind and sweet, to me and to every one else; but it cut me to the heart that you should look on me just as an old man and nothing else. I am old enough, God knows; but I am still young in soul; and I felt *that*."

"I am so sorry, Mr. Pilgrim; so very sorry; I never thought it could offend you; and I don't know that *I* should think any the less of you even if you were old." She said this with the memory of poor Georgie's youthful hysterics painfully fresh in her mind. "I must go, Mr. Pilgrim. Good-bye."

"Just a moment," Pilgrim said, coming between her and the way to the gate; "you had better hear it all out now; and there is no reason why you shouldn't, for it only concerns me; it's of no consequence to you.

But I should like you to know it just here once for all. Did you ever hear of men who had committed a murder or some such crime and who couldn't keep it to themselves, but must go and tell the story to the woods, or the waters, or the birds of the air? Well, I haven't committed any crime; but I am guilty of a great folly, and I must let it out to you; you must hear my confession. It is this, Miss Sabine; I am in love—with you."

She knew this was coming. The words spoken by Mrs. Pollen the night before came back to her mind; the kindness of a woman may kill a man sometimes! Why had she ever been friendly to this poor man? She felt shame and pity; shame for him and pity for him. How could a man of his age humble himself like that to a girl? It was all inconceivable to her; the possibility of anything of the kind had never occurred to her. "They all say that girls are self-conceited," she thought; "I only wish I had been self-conceited enough to think that this might happen." What was to come next? Was she never to speak to any man on pain

of his instantly making love to her? Such thoughts went through her even while she was still speaking.

"I wish you hadn't told me this, Mr. Pilgrim; I don't see what good it can do you. I don't know what I can say or do. I am very sorry, very; but I never thought of anything of the kind."

"Of course you didn't; how could you? I never thought of it myself; I thought I was far too old, and had gone through too much, to feel like that for any woman. I never meant to tell you; it all came out with a rush that time. I think for the moment I was out of my senses; I must have been. But it's done now, and it is a relief to me; you know it, and you will feel for me, and not be angry with me and hate me, as other women would. Don't despise me; oh, pray, Miss Sabine, don't, if you can!"

Camiola's special anxiety now was to get away. She did not despise him; she was not conscious of being angry with him; she was merely perplexed in the extreme.

"I am not angry," she said; "I don't think

it a thing to be angry about. I am sorry. I should like to have helped to make you feel happy, and I should like to have pleasant memories of our acquaintanceship always. I always liked you; I always liked to talk to you—and it's a pity, I think."

Thereupon she broke down, and could not say any more.

"Child," he said, with some energy, "it does you no harm—no more than if you were told that the dog loved you, or the trees and the winds. What does it matter to you if I love you? I couldn't help it, and you couldn't help it. God made you beautiful and good and sweet, and He made me a man with a loving heart, who never had a chance of loving before. Now I'll let you go; only I should just like to hear you say that you forgive me; and perhaps even that you understand me. Try to think what a broken-down poor creature like me must have felt when it made him let out this confession to a girl like you."

"I do understand you; indeed, I do; and I forgive you—if there is anything to forgive.

I don't know enough to know whether there is or not; and you will get over this. You lead too lonely a life here, I think. You brood over things, and fancies grow on you;" and she shook her head, and felt herself becoming preternaturally wise, as she thus reasoned out his case for him.

"Fancies!" he exclaimed—"fancies!"

She was going away, but she could not part from him in anything like unkindness. She held out her hand, and he took it and bent his head.

"You won't tell any one?" he said.

"Oh no! I shan't tell any one." She was growing red at the very idea of telling any one.

"God bless you!" he said. "If I were inclined to be an atheist, you would make me believe in God; for there must have been a God to make you; and a God to bless you!" he added with a wild smile, "you—you peerless girl! Good-bye; I'll not trouble you any more, you may depend upon that. You have treated me like a human being; I'll never again act like a brute. Don't think

of me any more; I am happy now—in a sort of way. You know my secret; it is like the lifting of a load off my heart to have told it to you. You will keep it to yourself; and you won't laugh at me or think any the worse of me; and now, come what will, I don't care what happens."

There was something in his expression as he said those words which sent a sudden fear through her.

"Mr. Pilgrim," she said gravely, "you will not be careless about your life? You will not think less of it because I am in your confidence; because I am your friend; because I like you so well?"

He did not quite understand her meaning at first. He was perhaps too much occupied with his own thoughts.

"Oh, that is what you mean," he said at last. "Oh no, I shan't do that. Life is much more precious to me now than it was before. And, in any case, do you think I would do anything which could annoy you or give you pain? That would be a poor return for all you have said, wouldn't it?"

"Thank you; that is quite enough," she replied. "It was only just a sudden thought of mine, but we understand each other now. You must leave this place; you have talents that are thrown away here. You must go to London, and fight the big fight of your life there, and make a name, and make all your friends applaud you and feel proud of you—as some of them do already."

"Leave this place—where I first saw you; where we are speaking now? No, I'll not do that; I'll live and die here."

Camiola left Fitzurse House. She had no longer any thought of waiting for Mrs. Pollen. She had left the rectory to escape from Georgie; now she found it better, after all, to get back to the rectory again. Her whole ideas were upset; she did not know from what quarter might come the next obnoxious declaration of love. She seemed to be driven like a shuttlecock from one place to another by declarations of love. Nothing is so trying, so hateful, to some girls as an unexpected and unwelcome declaration of love. Sometimes it does not even flatter a girl's self-

conceit; it rather hurts and humbles it. "What have I done to bring all this on me?" Camiola kept asking of herself. "I must have done something wrong; I must have given some sort of encouragement by my manner, or I should not have these things said to me." She felt miserable; all the more so because she could not tell any one of her troubles. Only yesterday she was still happy; a few days before that she had no thought that was not happy. Now everything was changed; she felt no surety about anything. After what had happened what might not happen?

When he saw the gate of Fitzurse House close behind her, Christian Pilgrim flung himself down flat on the ground, and grovelled there. The excitement had all gone, and he felt only hopeless pain and a shame that burnt into his very heart.

CHAPTER XII.

"WELL, I WILL MARRY THEE—ALAS!"

SOME of the days that followed were the saddest Camiola's life had yet known. Georgie Lisle forbore for a while to press her with his love-making; but he seemed miserable, and his health was not being restored; he was growing worse and weaker every day, and he looked unutterable things. Camiola felt only too sure that the whole story would come out before long. Georgie would certainly betray himself; Lady Letitia would suspect; would ask him; would press him; and he would tell her all; and then Camiola would be put in the odious light of a vain girl, who was allowing a generous boy to pine and die for love of her. "Why should I not marry him?" she sometimes

asked herself. "If it would make him and Lady Letitia happy, what could I do better?" Then the thought would come up that she did not love him; that he was not a man whom she could ever bring herself to love; and that if she did marry him, and did ever again see the man she could have loved, she would be miserable. She was angry with herself, and despised herself for her wild feeling towards Romont; but there it was, distinct and clear, a part of her life as surely as any physical fact that went to make up that life. She was in love with Romont; and her reason as well as her feeling inspired her. She knew that he was as surely the manner of man whom she could love and look up to, of whom she could make a hero, as Georgie was not and never could be. In moments of perplexity and pain it occurred to her that she ought to marry Georgie, if only to prevent people from finding out that she had been so weak, so unwomanly, as to fall in love with a man whom she hardly knew, who cared nothing about her, who was never thinking of her.

Meanwhile she saw nothing of Romont. He had gone down to the country, she heard some one say; anyhow, he did not come to Fitzurseham. Mrs. Pollen was a good deal away also; and when she was at Fitzurseham, was very busy apparently with the fitting up of her house. Walter Fitzurse came to the rectory almost every day, and rode and walked with Lady Letitia and Janette, and sometimes found opportunity for a quiet walk with Janette alone. For all her own heart-trouble, Camiola retained the keen use of her eyes, and could see that this young pair were coming to have all the ways of lovers, and she wondered whether Lady Letitia observed this, and what she thought of it.

One night Camiola was alone in her room and very melancholy. The hour for bed had come, and the family had all dispersed, but Camiola was not inclined to sleep, and so she remained in her bedroom trying to read, and sometimes looking out of her window across the river, and feeling the vague longing of a schoolboy to run away—anywhere, out of the

region of her present troubles. A low subdued knocking at her door startled her. Some bad news about Georgie, she thought at once. Georgie is very sick.

She opened her door, and saw Janette in a dressing-gown, with her hair about her shoulders, and with an expression of intense solemnity on her pretty little childlike face.

"May I come in, Camiola? I want to talk to you; I am so glad you are not in bed."

"Come in, dear. Is it anything about Georgie? Is he not well?"

"About Georgie?" Janette looked so utterly surprised that Camiola began to be afraid her own story and Georgie's must have told itself to her visitor. "What's the matter with Georgie?"

"I don't know, Janette; but, of course, he isn't very well, and I thought perhaps he had grown worse, and that you had come to tell me something about him."

"No, Camiola, dearest; I only want to talk about myself."

Camiola knew what was coming now.

The girls sat down side by side. Camiola waited.

"Can you guess what I want to talk about?" Janette asked, fixing her round and widely opened eyes on Camiola.

"Well, yes; I think so, Janette. Is it anything about Mr. Fitzurse?"

"About Walter Fitzurse, yes; now you know."

"You are in love with him?" Camiola spoke, it must be owned, in the tone of one who would say, "I wish you were not."

"I adore him. He is my hero and my idol; I could not live without him." Janette was always earnest and solemn; this time her earnestness and solemnity were almost preternatural.

"More trouble in this unlucky household," Camiola thought. "What nuisances we boys and girls must be to our unfortunate elders! Now I must talk all sort of commonplace wisdom to this poor little thing; as if I were not myself ten times more silly than she is."

"Are you going to marry him, Janette?"

"Oh yes," Janette answered in a low tone and looking down. "He—he loves me, you know."

"I should think he does," Camiola said, in a voice that seemed to say, "It would be like his impudence if he didn't."

"But you know, Camiola, it is so good of him; for I am so much beneath him in character; so utterly unworthy of him He is so high-souled; his aspirations are all so unselfish and so unworldly; he longs so for the better days that are to come to humanity on this earth. I can only look up to him. But he says I am essential to his life; to the development and completion of his nature; he needs me—oh! he is so good. And, do you know, Camiola, even in mere worldly rank he is much above me, for he belongs to so great a family. But he doesn't care about rank and all that sort of thing—and, of course, I don't, and you don't, Camiola; I have often heard you say you didn't. He wouldn't take a title if it were offered to him."

"Wouldn't he, dear? How very good of him!" Camiola said.

Janette looked up at her. "I know you don't quite appreciate him. You never did, I am afraid."

"Well, you see, Janette, it wouldn't do if we were all to appreciate him in the same sort of way, would it? It wouldn't do if I were to be your rival and try to poison you—as I suppose I should have to do."

"Still, I know you can be just to him and to me all the same; and so I trust you, Camiola." The little girl's eyes were sparkling with tears.

"My sweetest Janette, is there anything in the world I would not do for you? What do you want me to do for you in this? You don't want advice, I suppose?"

"No," Janette answered, shaking her head gravely; "I don't want advice; my mind is made up. So is Walter's. I want you to tell mamma."

"Oh, good gracious! My dear Janette, why not tell her yourself?"

"I meant to tell her, but I think I would rather you told her, Camiola. She would take it better from you. Besides, you could

argue the point better—you could defend him, and show that I am not acting unwisely, but very, very wisely, and all for my own good."

"But if I don't think so, Janette? If I can't think so?"

"Oh, but you must think so," and poor Janette's face contorted for a moment in sudden pain and alarm. "You must think so, Camiola, when I tell you that I could not live without him: that I must die; that I will die if I am not allowed to marry him; that I adore him. You must, you must think that it is for my good to marry him. Oh, you will help me in this; you will not desert me?"

What could Camiola do but kiss and kiss Janette and cry over her and promise her anything? How could she talk commonplace wisdom to the enraptured child; she who felt that there was so little of commonplace or any other kind of wisdom in herself? It was arranged before the girls parted for the night that Camiola was to find the very first suitable opportunity of telling Lady

Letitia that Janette and Walter Fitzurse were in love and were resolved to be married, and that she was to employ all the resources of her argumentative and persuasive skill to induce Lady Letitia to take the matter in good part and consent to the marriage. If Lady Letitia was willing, Mr. Lisle, the girls agreed, could easily be talked over into giving his consent. Camiola felt like a traitress to her dear friends, the Lisles, in making this promise. She had never liked or trusted Walter Fitzurse. There was something of antipathy in her feeling to him. She felt vaguely alarmed at the prospect of Janette becoming his wife; and yet she knew only too well that where Janette had once set her heart thither her passion and her resolve would surely lead her by one way or the other. Camiola passed a much more disturbed and distressed night than Janette did. Janette, indeed, was already cheered and made happy by the pledge of her friend's assistance and support.

Next morning, however, there was no opportunity for Camiola to act her mediating

part. The explosion she was herself expecting came. Georgie Lisle renewed his supplications to her, and failing once again, rushed to his mother and told her all, and besought her to use her influence to prevail on Camiola. Lady Letitia was overwhelmed with surprise. Her first feeling after the surprise was anger against her son; her next, vexation with Camiola. She went at once to Mr. Lisle's study, and told him all.

"It is terrible either way," Lady Letitia said; "terrible. To see one's boy in such a state is more than I can bear; and how can I press Camiola? She told him she doesn't love him, and that she never could; and how can I press her?"

"I wouldn't press her," the Rector said hastily. "Certainly *I* will have nothing to do with it. Let Georgie pull himself together and behave like a man, not like a silly child. Most men have had something of the kind to put up with some time in their lives, and have got over it. Let him do the same. I must speak to him."

"I don't think there would be any use in

speaking to him—at least just yet. It would be better not to show any want of sympathy; he would only feel it the worse. He is not like other young men; he never was. He is too sensitive, and he is madly in love with her. I am afraid he will do some harm to himself. After all, he would be a very fond husband; and many girls are very happy although the love was not on their side. It might grow in time; I think it would with a girl of Camiola's affectionate nature."

"I see you are giving way already, Letitia, and I am sorry for it. If I see Camiola and have any chance of giving her my advice I shall strongly advise her not to do anything of the kind."

"It is very hard upon me, St. George, because the poor boy keeps telling me that Camiola would have him if I asked her, and I dare say she would; and I would ask her readily enough if it weren't for her money. People would say that we had drawn her into this marriage because of her money. That is the very thing I always dreaded."

"Letitia, I don't think that is the way to

look at it. If I thought it was right and for Camiola's happiness to advise her to marry Georgie, I shouldn't mind what people said. People are always saying something disagreeable. But I don't think it would be right; I don't think he is the man Camiola would be able to love with her whole heart. How could a girl like that feel proper respect for a young man who goes on as that unfortunate boy is going on? I am sure I couldn't."

"But girls don't feel like that, St. George; they don't think the less of a man because he makes a fool of himself about them. My dear, I remember you were very crazy yourself at one time."

"I never would have tried to drive you and drag you into marriage, Letitia, if I knew that you didn't care about me."

"No," said Lady Letitia, with a faint smile, the first that had come on her pretty little face for some hours; "I am afraid I showed my hand very soon in that game, St. George. But we must think of the poor dear boy. After all he is our son, our only son; and I

dare say I did a great deal to spoil him. Then, you see, one good thing is, Camiola does not care for any one else; if she did of course that would make a difference."

"I'll have nothing to do with it," the Rector said, anxious now only to escape. "Take care what you are doing, Letitia." At the threshold of the house he met Camiola. He stopped and took both her hands, and said to her affectionately, "Camiola, my dear girl, don't let any one, *any* one, persuade you into doing what you don't yourself wish to do. You know what I mean, or you will very soon know; and remember what I say to you. Come to me for counsel and help if you want either. Follow the dictates of your own heart and your own conscience, my dear, and you will do right."

He went away, and she entered Lady Letitia's room much perturbed.

"This is terrible, my dear," Lady Letitia said to her, beginning her appeal with just the same words as she had used to her husband, and indeed they expressed exactly what she felt on the subject; "terrible! I

have just come from my unfortunate boy; he is in such a dreadful state; I really don't believe he can live; I don't indeed."

" Oh, my dearest Lady Letitia, I can't see you in such trouble; I can't see you all in such trouble; you whom I love; and I do love poor Georgie too; I love him like a brother, only I do wish he was not so weak and silly. But I'll do anything you like; I'll do anything you ask me. What does it matter whom I marry or what becomes of me, as long as I give you any happiness? Mr. Lisle has just told me to follow the dictates of my own heart and conscience. I am sure my heart and conscience could not tell me to do anything better than to act as you would wish me to do; you couldn't advise me wrong. I'll do whatever you ask me, dear, dearest Lady Letitia. Go and tell Georgie so." She flung her arms fondly round Lady Letitia's neck, and they shed affectionate tears over each other. Then after a minute or two of this relaxation Lady Letitia gently disengaged herself and said—

" No, Camiola, my love; this shan't be.

I have had a better feeling given to me; I am not so weak as I was; I will not ask you to make this sacrifice. You are too good and dear a child for that; and I ought to be more like a mother to you. The boy shall not have it all his own wilful way. It is better he should be disappointed than that you should be sacrificed. I'll go and tell him so this moment."

Alas! this was only the way to make Camiola more resolute than ever in her sacrifice. Lady Letitia did not mean this; for the moment she really meant what she said. She felt a stronger and a better will rising up within her, and she would have gone and told Georgie her resolve if Camiola had allowed her; but Camiola would not. It seemed to the girl that it would be better to be married at once and done with it; put out of the reach of any more persecution. Her late experiences had cast her into a mood to seek refuge and shelter anywhere; and to a girl marriage seems almost as secure a retreat from the troubles of the outer world as death itself. Besides, when

she got married she would be done with her absurd fancy for Romont; so she said to her own heart. She would make the whole family of the Lisles happy; she would secure herself from foolish love-fancies of her own, and from the persecution of other people's love-fancies. Oh yes; she saw her way growing quite clear before her.

For the moment, however, Lady Letitia would not yield. She insisted that Camiola must think the matter over once more before deciding; and Camiola promised to think it over, being quite decided in her own mind all the time. So the day went by, and she had said nothing about Janette's love-affair; and that very evening Janette came to her breathless, and drew her aside, and began with looks of intense earnestness—

"Camiola dear; you didn't say anything about *that* to-day?"

There was only one business in the world for Janette now, and it was *that.*

"No, Janette dear," Camiola said, rather penitently. "I hadn't much of a chance, you know. I thought it would not be well."

"Oh, I am so glad; I *am* so glad. Please don't say a word to any one; please, please don't."

"No. Have you changed your mind? Has anything happened?"

"Changed my mind, Camiola? I wonder at you. No, indeed; I never could change. But I have seen Walter, and he does not wish; he is particularly anxious that nothing should be said to any one just yet. He has reasons, the best reasons; I leave all to his judgment. Promise me this, Camiola—oh, you are so kind and good; promise me that you will not say a word to any one until I ask you again."

What could Camiola do but promise? Perhaps if she had been less troubled with her own affairs she might have suspected something in this change of purpose, but she suspected nothing and felt it a relief not to have to open the matter to Lady Letitia.

There was a strong family likeness between Georgie Lisle and his sister Janette. Both were impulsive, impetuous, sentimental, effusive, even hysterical; both were capable

of any amount of illusion and delusion; self-delusion not the least. But there was one great difference which out of qualities that otherwise might have been absolutely the same sent forth two human creatures with tendencies totally different. Georgie was an egotist; Janette was not. Janette's affections, loves, hopes, dreams, ambitions, were all for others and of others. Poor Georgie's egotism made him in many ways merely selfish. He could not conceive in his own mind the idea of self-sacrifice. He could not understand it; it never appealed to him; it made no part of his existence. He was madly in love with Camiola, and he merely thought of marrying her for his own sake, because he loved her. Janette had fallen madly in love with Walter Fitzurse, and she thought morning and night only of what would please him; what would suit him and serve him, what would bring her people to love him. It was for his sake solely that she consented not to speak out openly to her father and mother, tell them of her strong love, and ask them to allow her to marry her

lover. Walter would not have this; and she urged it no more. He told her that their only safe course was to make their marriage certain in the first instance; and she thought it was for him to say. Nobody could understand her welfare, she was satisfied, so well as the man who loved her and whom she loved. She would positively have consented to give him up if that would be for his good.

Some days of monotonous and unspeakable dreariness followed. The Rector's house brooded in gloom. Poor Georgie continued very unwell; so unwell that all talk of love and marriage was put aside for the moment; and this in itself was something of a relief if not an actual comfort to Camiola. But the face of Lady Letitia bore always a melancholy, half-reproachful expression as she looked at Camiola. "What have you done, what are you doing with my boy?" she seemed to ask. "Have you killed him, him whom Providence allowed to get over the danger of the savage enemy's spear?" Lady Letitia was far too kind and was too much of

a Christian woman to say anything like this to Camiola; and in her calmer moments she recognized the cruel injustice of such a thought. But her boy was ailing; her boy was weak; her boy was dying perhaps; and if Camiola had been more kind to him in time she might have saved him. People don't die of love now, to be sure, Lady Letitia admitted to herself; but Georgie might not have been sick at all if it had not been for his fatal passion. Lady Letitia did not know anything of the re-opening of Georgie's physical wound on the unlucky night of the entertainments at Fitzurse House. If she had known she would have found but another and much stronger reason for holding Camiola Sabine responsible for the illness and the danger of her boy. Camiola began to think in despair, "I cannot stand this any longer. If Georgie recovers —and oh, please God, he will recover—I will marry him; I will do anything they all like; what does it matter about me?"

One drear, windy, wintry, wild, cold evening, when summer seemed to have suddenly

dropped out of the sky, Camiola utterly gave way. Georgie was getting better.

"Oh, Lady Letitia, you must tell poor, dear, foolish Georgie that of course I'll marry him, since he really wishes it. I am following the dictates of my own heart and my conscience when I say that I will do what I know you would all like me to do; and I like it myself; I do, indeed. Now, I will go and tell Georgie myself—but you must come with me."

Camiola suddenly remembered that her announcement to her lover would probably be the signal for a storm of kisses if she were alone with him, and she shrank from this prospect with a shuddering sensation that did not seem the natural prelude to a happy bridal.

"Won't you go to him yourself, Camiola? Don't you think Georgie would rather hear it from your own lips without any one else being there?"

"No, dearest—at least I don't know; but I couldn't do that; I couldn't, indeed. You must come with me."

Lady Letitia's heart sank within her. She understood Camiola's reluctance. She could not help seeing only too plainly that Camiola's was a mere sacrifice.

" Camiola," she said, staying the girl with one hand, " I am afraid you have not thought enough of this."

" Oh yes, I have thought quite enough ; I don't want to think about it any more."

Little Alice suddenly bounced into the room with angry cheeks and eyes of fire.

" Don't do it, Camiola," the child exclaimed, " don't marry Georgie—he's a bad, nasty, selfish, silly boy ; and you shan't marry him. I don't love him any more ; not one bit, for he wants to take you away."

Alice kissed Camiola passionately and clung to her.

" But, Alice dear, he is not going to take me away ; I am to be here always."

" He *will* take you away," the child repeated ; " I know he will. People always go away when they are married. Mr. Fitzurse is going to take Janette away."

" For shame, you silly child," Lady Letitia

said, turning crimson with surprise and anger. "How can you say such things? Who told you to say that? What do you mean?"

"No one told me; but I know it all the same," Alice said doggedly. "Janette is going to marry Mr. Fitzurse, and he will take her away; and I am fonder of Camiola now; and I won't have her taken away. I'll go and tell Georgie that he shan't."

This created something like a diversion in Lady Letitia's mind, and for a moment Georgie's love-pangs were forgotten. The child was talking nonsense, she thought, utter nonsense; she was always saying odd things. But a boding chill went through Lady Letitia nevertheless. Was there a new trouble before her, of which, up to that moment, she had never dreamed?

"Where is Janette?" she asked. "Do you know, Camiola?"

"Janette is gone out with Mr. Fitzurse," Alice promptly answered; "I know she is."

Alice was right. Janette was at this moment with Walter in the old churchyard. The two were pacing slowly up and down,

just as he and Vinnie used to pace up and down the other day, and Walter was pouring his schemes and plans, his hopes and his love, into Janette's delighted, enraptured ear. Besides that she had a very loving and faithful little heart, she had a little head crammed full of what she considered new ideas about man's brotherhood and equality—ideas which must have been already making youthful converts in the earlier days of the family of Noah. The quiet, well-ordered, somewhat limited life of the rectory, with its pre-established doctrines and dogmas appointing every one's duty, had set little Janette longing for some eccentricity and extravagance of social philosophy. Walter was a wholly new figure to her; his way of life, his talk, his ambition, his courage, his audacious love-making, were all new, strange, and intensely fascinating.

"And you love me, darling?" he whispered.

"Love you?" she murmured. "Oh yes, you know it."

"If I ask you, you will come with me; you will trust yourself to me? We will go

and be married before we tell any one, and then they cannot part us."

"I will go anywhere with you; I will do anything you think right," she said, looking up to him with loving, trusting eyes.

Then he stooped and kissed her for the first time. It was a moment of intense rapture to both. To her it was the first kiss of her lover; to him it was the first kiss of an earl's granddaughter—the first kiss of a born lady.

It is not a good thing for a mortal to attempt to play the part of a providence or a destiny to other mortals. All legend, classic or otherwise, is full of warning on that subject. The bravest enterprise begun with this vain hope is likely to come to mere failure; the best intentions to beget only the poorest and most perverse results. We shall not attempt to justify the ambition of Mrs. Pollen to play the part of providence or destiny to the people of Fitzurseham; we only state the fact that she had such an ambition, and tell what came of it in certain instances. She was a noble-hearted woman, and whatever her

faults, her attempts in Fitzurseham were inspired mainly by a sincere desire to do good to some of her fellow-creatures. She had, indeed, always before her the thought of making atonement for her supposed or fancied neglect of her husband; but in truth her chief desire now was to make people happy. Along with that, however, there was a certain delight, keen and ever renewing, in the sense of power which her money and her schemes of benevolence gave her. She liked making experiments in human character and seeing how she could mould it, and how it would turn out. This was her most dangerous and most tempting pastime. She had been thus experimenting with Walter Fitzurse. She was anxious to know how he would turn out if a chance were given to his real character to assert itself. It was not quite clear to her for a while whether the good or the bad predominated in his nature; and she said to her own conscience that she was opening the way for the good to prove itself and take its place. But how if the good should not prove the stronger? How if the bad were

to get the upper hand? Would not her experimenting then only prove the means of furnishing Walter Fitzurse's worst enemy with weapons to slay Walter Fitzurse's best friend? Mrs. Pollen had not asked herself that question when she was making her mind up to give Fitzurse's ambition a chance in life, and now already, so soon, she was beginning to doubt whether the bad was not showing itself in ascendancy over the good.

She had given Fitzurse money with which to begin his career as a student at the bar, and to keep him like a gentleman for the present. She had allowed him to understand that money should not be wanting to him if he showed a desire and a capacity to make a name for himself in the world. The want of a fair start, she knew, had often spoiled many a career that would otherwise have been honourable, noble, beneficent; and she was determined that his chances should not thus be marred. "I can only give you the horse," she told him, disparaging her own bounty. "It is for you to ride the race. If you win, the honour is yours and not mine." It was

not necessary for her to disparage her own bounty. Walter was not over-scrupulous; he was quite willing to be fed from her hand. He took it as something due to his own genius and his own commanding attributes. Besides, she had told him of her hopes for the discovery of a long-lost relationship in Fitzurseham; and he soon began to think that she had already found out that he was the missing relative. He felt sure of this before she had yet thought fit to tell him of it. Anyhow, he took her generosity and good wishes altogether as something due to him, and for which he was bound, indeed, to be openly thankful, but which did not bring with it the slightest taint of personal humiliation. He was absorbed by one great overmastering purpose: he was resolved to marry Janette Lisle. This, it seemed to him, would be a magnificent start in life. He knew that the Lisles were not rich—not rich, that is, in the sense that Mrs. Pollen was rich, or even that Miss Sabine was rich—but they would give their daughter some money; and once he were married to her they must do some-

thing for him. He knew very well that Mr. Lisle and Lady Letitia were not by any means a Capulet and his wife, who would turn their backs for ever on a daughter because she had married without their consent; who would say to Janette Lisle when she had become Janette Fitzurse, "Do as thou wilt, for I have done with thee." No; once Janette and he were married there would be a welcome in the family for him; he would be received among aristocrats; his place would be sure; his prospects cared for. His ambition was for society; he would rather be the husband of Lady Letitia Lisle's daughter than of the richest plebeian heiress in the land. He assumed that the Lisles would not give their consent to the marriage if asked for it beforehand; and he had therefore made up his mind to run away with their daughter. In any case he preferred this way of attaining his end. It would be more striking, more romantic, more splendid, better as *réclame*.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MUSIC-ROOM.

THE decision was taken and was announced. Camiola told Georgie Lisle in his mother's presence that she would marry him. The ceremonial, if it may be called so, was not exactly gladsome. Georgie, indeed, was feverishly overjoyed, and seemed to think that Camiola's promise ensured a positive change in their natures and destinies. Lady Letitia read only of sacrifice in Camiola's eyes, and thought that the girl would not be happy, and wondered what Mr. Lisle would say, and what people generally would say. Meanwhile Janette and Fitzurse had not returned.

It was now about half-past six on the evening of the strange sort of day which we

have described, which anticipated late autumn or even winter itself at a season when summer was still not past its prime. Camiola felt that the blown clouds and the wind and the harsh wintry skies were congenial with her mood. She had made up her mind that, come what would, she must see Mrs. Pollen at once; for she had heard by chance that Mrs. Pollen was at Fitzurseham. Camiola had of late been feeling herself drawn more and more into sympathy with Mrs. Pollen; and Mrs. Pollen knew more about her than any other woman did. Nor was she thinking only about her own trouble. She was thinking much about Janette's love for Fitzurse, and Lady Letitia's sudden alarm. Camiola had positively promised Janette not to tell anything about her to any one for the present, and she did not see how she could break that promise, and yet it seemed hardly right of her to know so much and keep it all—keep any hint of it—from the knowledge of Lady Letitia. This was another reason why she must see Mrs. Pollen, and try to get from her some idea as to Walter Fitzurse's

real character and prospects—after having confided to Mrs. Pollen her own story; for she felt that she must confide it, that she could not bear the burthen if she had to keep it to herself.

Camiola was not afraid of meeting Christian Pilgrim again, although she would much rather not meet him. She was a girl of spirit, with a high sense of honour, and inclined, therefore, to put much trust in the honour of others. Pilgrim had told her he would never trouble her with love-making again, and she felt a full reliance in his promise. She would much rather not see him, but it was certain that she would have to see him many times in the future, and it little mattered when. She would have time enough to go to Fitzurse House and have quite a long talk with its owner, and get back and be ready for dinner. In any case she preferred not to be in the rectory when Janette returned; for she feared there would be some sort of a scene, and that she might be brought into it without any capacity on her part to make things the better for any-

body. In what way Mrs. Pollen could help her or help anybody concerned, she had no idea, and did not stop to think. Mrs. Pollen generally managed to impress those who knew her with the conviction that she was a woman who could suggest something helpful in any manner of human emergency. So Camiola left the rectory and made for Fitzurse House.

The day was falling amid stormy cloud and boding of bad weather. The steps of the Old Ferry Inn were splashed by sullen waves lashing themselves into anger; chains and ropes were groaning and creaking everywhere; the trees in the churchyard bent their heads and moaned; the water was of livid steel-like colour. It would have needed very high animal spirits indeed to keep one from a boding sense of approaching evil of some kind, on such an evening and in such a place. Camiola had enough of genuine and personal reason for depression to be proof against any mere omen of cloud or wind. Her heart was beating so loudly that she could hear the sound at intervals, when the

wind was hushed for a moment. Yet, burthened as she was with her own expectations of trouble, she could not repress a shudder of mere physical gloom and awe as she looked in through the railings of the churchyard and saw the tombs and the graves in that ghastly twilight.

She hurried on, struggling against the wind at corners, and fearing sometimes that she must be blown right off her feet. She got somehow to Fitzurse House. The great gate was closed, but there was a smaller side gate which she knew was always open until very late at night. She made her way in and looked around her. There was no light in any of the front windows, although the dusk had gathered heavily over the forlorn place. For a moment Camiola felt as if she were venturing on some fateful errand to some dread lone home of enchantment.

Fitzurse House was still in an unfinished condition. All day long workmen were busy there. Mrs. Pollen was gradually reclaiming or reconstructing room after room; but it was not yet in a condition to be called a

dwelling-house, much less a home. Mrs. Pollen never slept there. No one, in fact, slept there but Christian Pilgrim. When Mrs. Pollen came there in the day she generally brought her maid with her, and took the maid back to her town lodging at night. Mrs. Pollen went and came in the most irregular manner, and was pleased to be allowed to come and go without officious attendance or questions asked. When the workmen had gone for the evening she was sometimes absolutely alone in the house. She often despatched Christian Pilgrim to execute some commission for her, sent her maid somewhere else, and remained in the house alone. Perhaps when Christian or the maid returned, Mrs. Pollen was gone. If she had not to dine in town, she sometimes had a morsel of dinner brought to her in Fitzurse House, and stayed there until late in the night. She had been a long time in the habit of doing as she pleased—so she used to say—and it pleased her to do as she pleased.

Camiola, therefore, did not feel by any

means assured that because Mrs. Pollen had been in Fitzurse House an hour before, she must necessarily be in Fitzurse House now. The great front door was closed; but Camiola knew her way to one of the side doors, and she found it invitingly open, and saw light streaming from some of the rooms in that part of the house. She went in, and was guided in her quest by the soft sound of an organ, played in low tone and with a touch that somehow seemed to say the organist was listening to something else while waking the sound of the keys. Camiola knew at once that Mrs. Pollen was in the music-room which she was having constructed, and in which she took immense pride and interest. Camiola had not yet seen it. Following the guidance of the music she soon came in sight of the half-open door of a room, at the end of a long corridor or gallery. As she came near this the organ ceased its sound, and she heard Mrs. Pollen say in a high and animated tone—

"Tell the truth, then; tell the whole truth. Go to the girl fairly and openly, and tell her,

and then I will help you if I can. But I'll not stand any deceits. Tell her that you are no more a Fitzurse than I am, and if she doesn't mind, then take your chance. But let us have the truth, if you want help or countenance from me."

Camiola was actually knocking at the door to stop any further utterances not meant for her when these last words were spoken. She would have given much that she had not heard them; she would have been rejoiced to get away even now. But it was too late. The voices ceased.

"I came to look for you, Mrs. Pollen," Camiola said, almost breathless. "Have I disturbed you? May I come in?"

"Come in, you darling girl? of course you may come in. I am delighted to see you. It's only Mr. Fitzurse. He has been admiring my music-room. Don't you admire it? All my own ideas. We shall have many a concert here. How do you like the effect of the light?"

The room was a beautiful amphitheatre, with very long enclosing arms and a narrow

platform, making the chord of the arc. On the platform stood an organ. All round the cornices just beneath the ceiling ran a succession of lights, concealed and softened by screens of pearly glass. The light filled the room, but no lamp or burner was to be seen; no point of distracting lustre. Beneath there were windows, now so heavily curtained that no streak of the pallid twilight was seen within, and no gleam could have shone out upon the night. There was a great fireplace with much creamy marble and tiles. The roof looked like an inverted shell. There were no actual adornments—no spangles, so to speak. The form and colour of the music-room were its ornamentation.

Not much, perhaps, in the humour for artistic admiration, Camiola nevertheless did admire the room, the marbles, the tiles, the noble organ, the music-stands and instruments, the soft involving light. She had, however, first to exchange a greeting with Walter Fitzurse, who was looking embarrassed and sullen when she came in. There was a sort of insolence too, of some-

thing like triumph and defiance in his manner now, Camiola thought.

"By the time I have this great old house all finished," Mrs. Pollen said, "it will be about the proper period for me to die. No matter; I will leave it to some charming person, who shall make it look beautiful by her presence; and she will sit here of evenings and play delicious things on that organ; and I shall hear her—oh yes, I shall hear her."

"Even in death?" Fitzurse asked.

"Why not? I suppose you don't believe in anything to come after death, Mr. Fitzurse? I am told it is not the way with clever young men now to believe anything."

"Oh, pardon me, I didn't say that," Walter hastened to interpose. He cast an alarmed glance at Camiola. Unbelief might be a very fine thing in its way, and show off well under proper conditions, but it would never do if Miss Sabine were to be allowed to tell the people at the rectory that Walter Fitzurse was an unbeliever.

"I am glad," Mrs. Pollen said quietly, in

her deepest tone. She saw through him with one quick, penetrating glance. "You are looking at that curtain, Miss Sabine? It puzzles you?"

For there was a heavy curtain of pearl-grey plush, which hung down apparently for no purpose at one side of the room.

"Yes; it's a beautiful thing in itself, but I don't quite understand what it is doing there."

"This is the idea, you see." Mrs. Pollen lifted an edge of the curtain, and showed that there was a small door, itself also curtained, behind it. "That door opens out on the lawn. I mean to have it locked, but each of my few special friends shall have a key. They can come in from the grounds without passing through the house, and go in the same way. That shall be the privilege of my friends; and then we have only to lock the door on the corridor side and we shall be safe from all dull intruders. We shall want nobody but those who have the privileged key. You shall have a key, Miss Sabine, of course; and then you can come

and play here whenever you like without any trouble of ringing at doors and being shown in by servants. I have promised Mr. Fitzurse a key also—if he will be good and do everything I tell him to do."

"You may trust me," Walter said fervently.

"Yes? Well, I do trust you. Stay, I will get you both your keys. Don't go a moment, Mr. Fitzurse."

These latter words reassured Camiola, who began to fear her visit would all come to nothing. "Don't go a moment," clearly meant, "you are to go after a moment."

Mrs. Pollen left the room.

"Is Janette at home, Mr. Fitzurse?" Camiola asked quickly.

"Oh yes; at least I suppose so. Miss Lisle was going home when I left her."

"I am glad," Camiola said emphatically.

"You know all," Fitzurse said, approaching her and speaking in a tone little above a whisper; "she told me. You know our secret; you know that we love each other. You will not betray us?"

"I have promised Janette. I am afraid I did wrong, but I have promised, and I suppose I must keep my word. But you will go to Mr. Lisle or Lady Letitia, and speak to them?"

"They would hate me, because I am poor."

"Oh no, no; not if she loved you. They are too fond of her. They would do anything for her. Mr. Fitzurse, you will not bring this child into a quarrel with her father and mother?"

At this moment Mrs. Pollen came back. She gave to Camiola a dainty little key of silver. "That is your passport and your pledge of eternal welcome," she said; "and, Mr. Fitzurse, here is the key I meant for you. Oh—another thing I want you to notice. You see that little box?" she pointed to a handsome casket, not very little, that stood on a table. "Each of these keys opens that too; and I generally keep some money in it. Money is always wanted for something or other here, while all this work is still going on; and if I should not be here, or Mr.

Pilgrim, I should be glad that my friend who happened to be in the way should know where a few sovereigns could be had to pay wages and that sort of thing. I pay my own wages; I don't contract in the ordinary way; I much prefer to do my own work. Of course, Pilgrim generally does the actual business of paying; but still I have to do it myself sometimes."

She opened the casket and showed a great deal of gold.

"I think you keep too much money lying about in a place like this," Walter said.

"Nobody knows, except Pilgrim, and a few of us. The ordinary burglar would never think of looking for money in a music-room and a lady's glove-box. One must have money on hand here; a cheque would sometimes paralyze the resources of Fitzurseham."

"Still, there are a great many bad characters about Fitzurseham, and I strongly recommend you to be cautious."

"My dear friend, I am cautious. I have lived in countries and slept in places where your host would cut your throat for the value

of one of your rings if only he could do it without being found out. I have learned some lessons in caution, I can assure you. Are you going?"

Yes; he was going. He said good-bye and looked an imploring look into Camiola's eyes as he went.

The moment he was gone Mrs. Pollen set a chair for Camiola, and sat herself down to the organ again; but she did not touch the keys.

"Now, then, Camiola dear," she said, "tell me all about it—something has happened and you have come to talk to me. Well, what is it?"

"First, it is about me."

"Oh, first it is about *you*. Yes; and next it is about Janette Lisle."

"It is; but how did you know?"

"Well, I knew; now, first about yourself?"

"I have been and done it, Mrs. Pollen," Camiola said, with downcast eyes and a dismal attempt at pleasantry.

"You don't mean to say you have promised

to marry that crazy boy—promised to marry Georgie Lisle?"

"I do! I have promised."

"What on earth made you do that?"

"They are all so fond of him; I am so fond of *them;* I owe so much to Lady Letitia; I couldn't see them in trouble about him; and besides, what does it matter? How could I do better with my life? I have a great affection for him; and if I can make him happy is not that the best use I could put my life to? A girl ought to try to make some man happy. Perhaps I am fortunate that there is some one who thinks me necessary to his happiness. It is something to live for. I haven't anything else."

"Stuff!" Mrs. Pollen vehemently interrupted. "A girl like you ought to know better than that. You have no right to give yourself away to this young man merely to oblige his father and mother. He is a miserable creature who persuades you or allows you to do such a thing. Have you positively promised? are you actually engaged?"

"Yes, Mrs. Pollen, I gave my promise today."

"Break it off, then! Tell them you cannot marry him. Speak frankly out to Lady Letitia. Speak to Mr. Lisle. He is a good man, he will understand you. He will not allow you to be talked into such a marriage."

"He has been so good and kind to me. He spoke as kindly and tenderly as if I were his daughter. He told me not to do anything that my heart and my conscience did not justify, and I have followed his advice. I have asked my heart and my conscience, and they do justify it. They tell me that I could not do anything better with my life than to make poor Georgie and Lady Letitia happy. Oh, what other use is life to me?" Camiola stood up and clasped her hands across her forehead. She did not want her tears to be seen.

"Tell me, dear," Mrs. Pollen said gently, "why—if you have resolved on this, and given your promise—why did you come here?"

"I hardly know; oh, I don't know at all. I wanted to tell you, to talk to you; I don't know why."

"I do; I know it even though you may think you don't. Shall I tell you why you came here at once to me, Camiola?"

"No, Mrs. Pollen; at least I don't think I want to know. You might have guessed something wrong."

"I have guessed something and it is not wrong. Come, I'll tell you; and we shall see how your resolve will hold after that."

"Pray don't," Camiola implored, covering her face more closely than ever with her hands.

"Oh yes; I must show you what you are doing. You came to me out of a sort of sympathy, a yearning for sympathy; because I am the only person in the world who knows why you do not love Georgie Lisle; who knows that you do love some one else, and knows who that some one is. That is what forced you to come to me."

There was silence for a moment.

"Come, look up, and talk to me," Mrs. Pollen said, going to Camiola, and gently drawing her hands from her eyes.

Camiola had recovered some of her com-

posure. The worst was known and said now. "But what would be the use, Mrs. Pollen, even if this were so? It is mere folly on my part; sheer madness. I hardly know him at all; I haven't often spoken to him; there never was a word of love-making between us. He never thought about me—you can't call that being really in love with a man."

"I am romantic enough even yet to be a believer in affinities and love at first sight," Mrs. Pollen said composedly; "and I believe your love for him will last you all your life; and I believe still more that he is just the man you ought to love. These are my sentiments."

"Still, as things are," Camiola said, more courageously, "you see, my loving, whether it is for an age or for all time, couldn't come to anything. I must do my best to forget him; and the surest way of forgetting him is to think of some one else. When I have Georgie Lisle to make happy that will fill my life for me, and I suppose I shall come to love him in the end. Oh, I have thought

over all this; I have not been acting on mere impulse and the spur of the moment. I know my own weakness; but I also think I know where I could be strong. No, you are kind and sweet, and I thank you ever so much; but I think this is right to do, and I think I can do it. So my mind is made up, Mrs. Pollen. I have had my little silly hour or two of raving; and now I am a sensible girl again."

Camiola felt very brave and resolute now.

Mrs. Pollen returned to her organ, and began to play something of Beethoven's. She played with an easy, firm touch, with full tenderness of expression. The music was an impassioned yet subdued lament for lost love and youth; all of regret that is not ignoble, of pathos that is not enervating, seemed to have been breathed into it, to breathe from it.

"Pray don't," Camiola softly pleaded, laying her hand on Mrs. Pollen's arm. "Pray don't play that. I can't stand it just now."

"I meant to touch you, dear," Mrs. Pollen

said, looking up with an inexpressible tenderness in her dark and earnest eyes. "I was trying to speak to your very heart. I wanted to plead there against the cruel sacrifice of all that makes life worth having to a young and generous woman. Well, is it of no use?"

"Of what use could it be? I cannot make myself happy according to my fancies and dreams and follies. But I can make some one else happy: and that will make me happy in the end."

"I am sorry," said Mrs. Pollen, "but I don't believe in argument about such things; and a willful woman will have her way. At all events she won't have it the less for being told she ought not to have it. Well, there was something else you wanted to talk to me about, but I think we may put that off. Nothing will happen immediately; I hope nothing may happen at all. I couldn't think much about anybody's affairs just now, Camiola, but only yours; and so go home, dear. Shall I send some one with you?"

"Oh no, Mrs. Pollen—for what purpose?

It is not dark yet, and I should hate to have any one with me."

Mrs. Pollen shook her head sadly. Then she kissed Camiola, and Camiola went away. Not another word was spoken between them.

Mrs. Pollen rang a bell and her maid came.

"Is Mr. Pilgrim in?"

"He has just come in, ma'am."

"Ask him to come in here, please."

Mr. Pilgrim presently made his appearance, grave, stooped, and melancholy as ever.

"Do you know Mr. Romont's address, Mr. Pilgrim?"

"Yes, madame."

Mrs. Pollen wrote a few words on a scrap of paper.

"Will you telegraph that to him for me?"

"Certainly, madame."

As Pilgrim was leaving the room, she said, "I expect Mr. Merridew here in a few minutes. He may come to me at once. Tell me, Mr. Pilgrim, are you at all curious as to Mr. Merridew's visits to me; are you

curious to know what we have to talk about, he and I ?"

"No, madame. I am not curious about many things; and I assume that you would tell me if there was any occasion for me to know."

"You are quite right in that. I may perhaps have something to tell you to-night after he is gone. There may be something to interest you."

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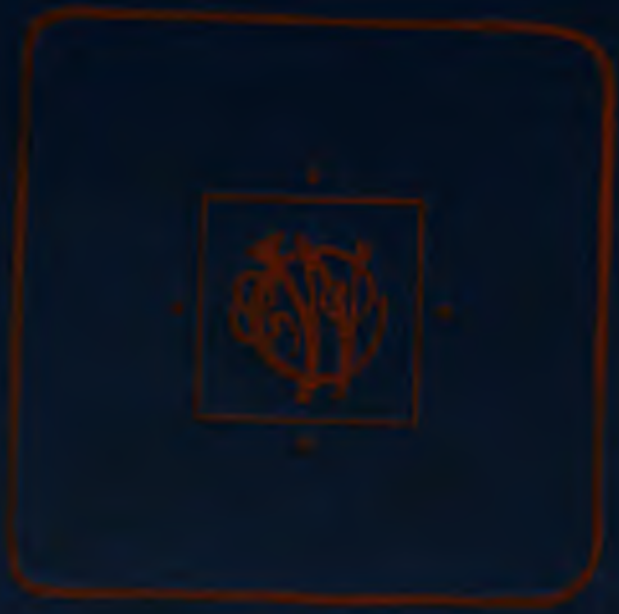
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